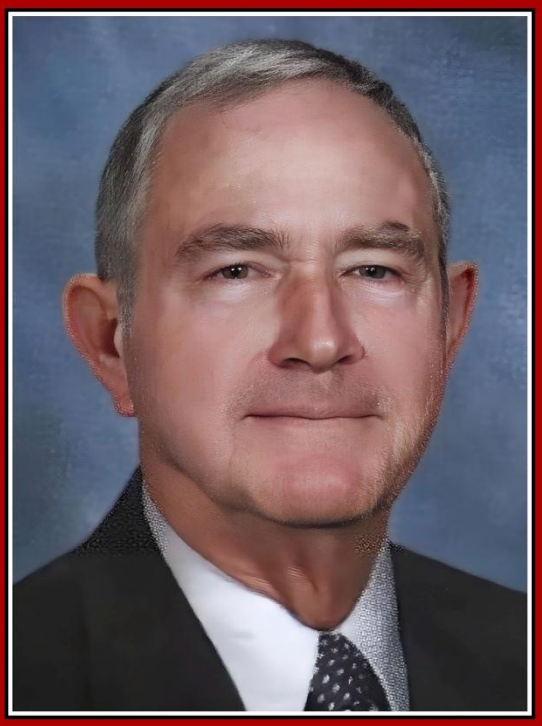
More of My Life

Memories of family & friends, the U.S. Navy, and old Floridian towns such as Sarasota, Old Myakka, and Bradenton.



Donald E. Betts

More of My Life

Memories of the U.S. Navy, Sarasota, Old Myakka, Bradenton, and Lakewood Ranch, Florida.

PDF Version

Donald E. Betts

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The font for the main text of this book is the **Times New Roman, 14 Point** because it is a comfortable read for everyone.
Stan Paregien, Editor

Dedication

It was my grandson, Clinton Betts and his wife Christina who presented me with a handsome book of homework. You see, that leather-bound book requires the recipient to respond in writing to scores and scores of questions related to my life. That book is titled, **The Story of a Lifetime: A Keepsake of Personal Memories.** It has 384 pages of questions and space to respond in writing.

The nature of that well-designed book presented me with two big problems. First, at 93 years young my penmanship has pretty much come to a stop. I just cannot do it, not where most people could decipher my chicken tracks. Second, that book has far too many questions that I either cannot answer or choose not to do so. After all, this is my story and I will tell it.

Therefore, I have decided to create my own book with the help of our long-time friend and co-author, Stan Paregien of nearby Bradenton, FL. That is the nature of what you are about to read.

So, I wish to dedicate this book to **Clinton and Christina Betts** for their love and thoughtfulness in nudging me on to finish this book.

About Don Betts

The many facets of my life have not exceeded that of most any other person born into this world. I was never a politician, but my employment in the lower echelon of State government gave me some insight as regards bureaucratic shortsightedness. I was never an astronaut, but I have enjoyed private and commercial flying as a passenger.

I was not a war-hero, but I served my country for four years in the U.S. Navy and received an honorable discharge. Along the way I was also a police officer and a park ranger.

I was never considered an educator, but I have endeavored to share what little I know in a positive manner.

Late in high school, I wished to possibly teach and preach. So, I dreamed of attending Freed-Hardeman College in Henderson, Tennessee. That did not work out. It was my pleasure however, to deliver short messages from time to time to the folks at the now extant Eastside church of Christ in Sarasota - when our preacher, Dr. Pat Hardeman, was absent.

I never earned a Ph.D. in History. However, I enjoy reading historical tales and occasionally I even learn valuable lessons from life's history book. Over time, I have amassed a dozen or so different books relating to Sarasota and Manatee County history. The internet is rife with information and, of course, local libraries are filled with publications that are awe inspiring, especially when you compare the present to the past. Change is the watchword for this area's existence.

In my generation alone, urban growth has been unimaginable, especially when compared with the pristine inland and coastline of the aforementioned counties. One item of comparison: when I first drove an automobile in Sarasota there were only three traffic signal lights. Main Street was the only street with streetlights. Today's thoroughfares boast thousands of lights and just as many traffic signals, most with turn lanes and directional turn indicators. Not to mention those pesky and tricky round-abouts.

Well, I encourage everyone to visit the different avenues of information and take a look back into both written and pictorial history. It has been written, "You can't know where you're going if you don't know where you've been." Even if that doesn't seem to apply to your life, there is a world of interesting reading. And you will be better informed if you take a stroll down the path of history.

I did really get up in the world in one of my first real occupations. That was during the years I was a lineman for the Florida Power and Light Company. A few times in that work I was literally up way higher than I wanted to be.

I was never one of the “movers and shakers” in politics or one of the “captains of business or industry.” But I did attain a reasonable status in the banking field; appointed Vice President of Inter City National Bank at Cortez Plaza.. And for a few years I achieved success in both sales and customer service for a statewide insurance company.

I don’t have a trophy room containing my large and impressive plaques for being “Poet of the Year in Florida,” “Florida’s Farmer of the Year” or for being “Florida’s Father of the Year” or a golden trophy for being “Husband of the Year in Florida.”

Nope, no such thing at all. Yet in all those categories I tried to fulfill my roles with devotion to duty, with respect and love for co-workers and, especially, for my wife and family.

I am content being who I am. Hindsight says our life accomplishments would have reached a grander scale if we had just done so and so. You can fill in your own blanks. To some degree though, this is what life is, isn't it? Living day by day, using our best God given talent to do the best we can.

If we awake on the morrow, we have the chance to overcome the errors made on the previous day. If those errors are of a sinful nature, we have the promise of atonement if we will ask for forgiveness. The scriptures are true: Prayer avails much.

I spend much of my time thinking about spiritual things. My feelings of who I am are not limited to the physicality of life. The things we see, the things we learn and do while here on earth are the things that nourish our soul for eternal life. To that end, it is my desire to be a good example for all who read my words and get a glimpse of what family life has been up until this next day of the rest of my life.

I rue the errors in my past and ask for deliverance from mistakes in the future. There is an old song that says, "If I have wounded any soul today, if I have caused one soul to go astray, Lord forgive". My sentiments, my prayer.

Family life on earth is deeply integrated into God's family. We are all God's children and Jesus is our brother. Tell me, if you can, why would anyone wish to gamble on a different equation that is detrimental to their eternal life?

"This is the end of the matter . . . fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man." Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ASV)

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Chapter 1

Questions:

On page 13 of my homework, there are several questions. (1) If your ancestors emigrated from another country, where did they come from? (2) When? (3) How did they come? (4) Where did they settle and why? (5) What do you remember about your oldest relative(s) you knew personally?

My Answers:

My paternal ancestors - the Betts - emigrated to America from the United Kingdom; most were farmers and tradesmen in the southern part of England, (i.e. Suffolk and Kent).

Thomas Betts, Sr., first in Dad's line to immigrate, was known to be involved in the settlement of Norwalk, Connecticut, (British Colony) in the early 1600's. During the Revolutionary War some descendants moved to Canada.

My grandfather, **Joseph Cemore Betts**, was born in New Brunswick, Canada in 1870. The family eventually moved to the state of Maine, then, as a young man, my grandfather worked his way south to Anthony, Florida where my dad was born in 1893. A year later they lived in Arcadia where siblings were born. In 1902 my aunt Annie Betts was born. And Myakka, Bradenton and Sarasota became the family's various places of abode. My Grandmother - **Agnes Virginia Betts** - died birthing Annie. Several years later, my Grandfather Joseph Betts remarried.

My maternal ancestors, the **Brenizer** clan, were of German origin, perhaps from the Black Forest region (Baden-Baden?). The first known to immigrate to America settled in Pennsylvania. They were among the large number of farmers and tradesmen that were known as the "Pennsylvania Dutch". They lived in several of the settlements near the capitol, to include Shippensburg and Mechanicsburg.

My Great-Grandfather, **Joseph Ritner Brenizer**, was named for the Governor of Pennsylvania that was in office in the year of his birth. The three original Brenizer brothers to immigrate to America moved farther west and settled on 500 acres of land with the purpose of raising cattle.

Joseph Ritner

Joseph Ritner was the 8th person to serve as Governor of Pennsylvania. He was born on March 25, 1780 in Reading, PA. He bought a farm and in 1801 at the age of 21, married Susan Alter, and they had 10 children. He was a soldier in the War of 1812. In 1820, he ran on the Democratic-Republican ticket and won election to the House of Representatives in Pennsylvania. In 1935, he ran for and successfully became the Governor of PA. He was a vocal opponent of slavery. He left the governorship in 1839.

My great-grandfather, **Joseph Ritner Brenizer,** found coal on his property and eventually, had several mines in operation. The miners needed to perform the pick and shovel work soon increased in number and the community became a town known as **Brenizer, Pennsylvania**. That community still exists today as an unincorporated settlement. It is located between I-96 and Tasker St., and has a **W. Ritner Street**.

My maternal Grandmother -**Anna Mary Brenizer** - was born in Shippensburg, PA on Oct. 12, 1866. She married my grandfather, **George Frank Shawl**, in Darke County, Ohio. Grandpa Shawl was born in Pennsylvania on March 17, 1864. There exists some ambiguity regarding his birth name. It appears he was born **George Franklin Reed** but was raised by a family named Shawl. It seems he was given the Shawl family name when he was a youth. It is not known if the Reed parents were separated early in their marriage.

George and Anna Mary (Brenizer) Shawl had a daughter – my mother – born there in 1902. In 1904, another move found the family in Gainesville and Alachua, Florida. Most of the family eventually settled in Bradentown, Florida (it became today's Bradenton).

My paternal grandparents were deceased before I was born. My mother's parents are remembered for their annual visit in our home for a week at Christmas. I recall Gramma at work in the kitchen with Mom at five in the morning on Christmas day. Their big job was picking pin-feathers from a fresh turkey carcass. Anna Brenizer Shawl passed away when I was only thirteen. Grandpa Shawl chewed **Beech-Nut Scrap Tobacco** to everyone's chagrin. He passed when I was eighteen years of age.

My Grandmother was a homemaker. She raised four daughters while taking care of her husband who had a railroad construction injury. She delighted in visits from her grand-children and though she had few possessions, was happy with her life. Grandpa Shawl was quiet and unassuming, with chronic asthma. He was a morally good man, and evidently a hard worker in his young years.

Questions:

(1) If you have inherited any of the characteristics of your mother's parents, describe what they are and how you feel about them. (2) What do you know about their values, philosophies, and religious beliefs.

My Answers:

Whether it is genes, (DNA?) or my personal acceptance of life using God given commonsense, I am uncertain. The waning years of my grandparent's life, and the beginning of mine, were an era quite different than the one that exists now.

As I near my 94th year of life, I live in a throw-away world. When a given thing is worn, now it just gets tossed and something new is bought to replace it. In the previous lifetime, socks were darned if a hole appeared. Paper bags were reused until they were torn or too weak to hold the next needed use. No food was thrown away if it could be served again. But if it were thrown out, it was made available to the hogs or chickens. The acceptable philosophy was, "too much is always enough!".

Values never fell short of the Ten Commandments. My Shawl grandparents were born into the Pennsylvania Dutch traditions, and manner of religious practice. Early in their lives they attended the Church of the Brethren. When they moved to Florida, they became established in the church of Christ, and remained so until their demise.

Questions:

(1) What kind of work did your mother's parents do? (2) What else would you like to say about them.

My Answers:

My mother's Mom - **Anna Mary (Brenizer) Shawl** - was typical for the era in which she lived. She was a housewife; a home maker. She cooked, cleaned, quilted and did the

multitude of things that wives and mothers did before the advent of modern conveniences that are taken for granted in today's society. She was married before electricity and automobiles were in existence. She helped her mother weave cloth from flax.

When Mom's dad – George Shawl – was young, he left Pennsylvania for Darke County, Ohio. One of his first jobs was as a **"gandy-dancer"** on one of the expanding railways. A gandy-dancer is a slang word which, according to ***Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia***, was used to describe the constant movement – even to a rhythm, a beat, dance, or melody – of the men who built the railroad tracks using tie tongs, pick axes, crowbars and sledge hammers. It was hard work for long hours and poor wages, so a great many of them were new immigrants. Workers in the southwest who were Mexicans or American-Mexicans were often called ***traqueros*** (Spanish for "track workers," that is, section hands and gandy dancers.

Later, George apprenticed as a "carriage blacksmith" after reaching Union City, Ohio. That meant he worked on horse-drawn buggies and wagons. As time and circumstance dictated, he was engaged in farming with relative families in Ohio. In Alachua, Florida, he worked in what was noted as a lucrative job managing the local ice-house. His work in Bradenton, Florida was that of brick-mason. He was responsible for much of the original sidewalk construction in Old Manatee and Bradenton.

In semi-retirement, Grandpa George maintained landscaping of homeowner properties in exchange for living quarters for he and my grandmother. He never owned an automobile or any power tool.

My Grandpa Shawl walked with a stout hickory cane for all the years that I knew him. While walking in West Bradenton one day, he came across a Diamondback rattlesnake. With only that short walking-stick, he dispatched the large viper as it crossed the sidewalk. He was in his late seventies with poor eyesight and poor health, but became the talk of the town when his deed was made public.

Questions:

(1) When and where were your father's mother and father born? What was his mother's maiden name? (2) Describe the kind of persons they were.

My Answers:

Previously noted, my dad's father - **Joseph Cemore Betts** - was born in New Brunswick, Canada on May 7, 1870. .He was never naturalized as a US citizen. Dad's mother was born in Georgia, USA, on August 13, 1876. Her name was **Agnes Virginia Smit**h. Little is known of her, she was deceased in 1902. Dad was only nine years of age when she passed.

My Grandpa Joseph was known as an entrepreneur. Primarily a carpenter by trade, he was also a sawmiller, lumberman, drayman, and citrus grower. He was small in stature but a very hard worker though hampered with asthma like my maternal grandfather. He

remarried several years after the death of my dad's mother and fathered seven additional children.

Questions:

(1) If you have inherited any of the characteristics of your father's parents, describe what they are and how you feel about them. (2) What do you know about their values, philosophies, and religious beliefs? (3) What kind of work did your father's parents do? (4) What else would you like to say about them?

My Answers:

If I inherited any worthwhile traits attributed to my grandparents, I suppose it would be their attitude of live and let live. They were seemingly peaceable folks with strong work ethics. My step-grandmother, **Mellie Cooke Betts** (1890/1969), in addition to birthing seven offspring, managed a boarding house, managed a restaurant, and retired from managing the laundry of the Sarasota Memorial Hospital. She spent much time in her Bible and church work. She was strong in her spiritual beliefs.

Grandpa Joseph had several "jobs" in his lifetime. Again, in the years primarily known as "horse and buggy days". The same for Miss Mellie, (as she was called).

I have worn several hats in my working career, believe man was born to work, and have strong feelings for God's place in my life and hope of the hereafter. What more can I say?

Questions:

(1) Has your mother shared any stories she knew about her parents' childhoods? (2) When and where was your mother born? (3) Where did she grow up? What was her maiden name?

My Answers:

My mother shared much of what I've previously outlined in regard to her parents. Humble beginnings, with many relatives in the **Union City, Darke County, Ohio** area. All, hardworking folks in a time of expansion of the economy of the USA when most work was still done by hand. Any owned farm machinery or tools were still animal or human operated. Mom was born (at home) at Union City, Ohio on November 3, 1902. She was named, in part, for her mother, Mary. Loretta was her middle name, and, she was the youngest of her siblings in the Shawl family; **Mary Loretta Shawl.**

Mom was moved to Gainesville, Florida when she was only two years of age. Her sub-teen years were spent there and in Alachua, Florida. Her teen years were spent in Bradenton, Florida where she earned her eighth-grade education and married at age seventeen.

Questions:

Tell about the family in which your mother grew up. Do you know what her childhood was like? Do you remember any stories she told you about it?

My Answers:

My mother's childhood is basically a mystery to me. She talked of being a good student and liked to write, when pen and paper were available. At age sixteen, she wrote a poem that contains an element of authorship from one beyond their years. (I am still in possession of her original hand-written copy).

The eldest of Mom's three sisters (**Minnie Mae**) was fourteen years older than Mom, and it has been said that she often considered herself a surrogate mother to her youngest sister. Mom never spoke unkindly of my Aunt Minnie, but I have the impression that she sometimes resented her role as "baby sister".

Question:

What memories do you have of your mother during your childhood?

My Answer:

I have many memories of my mother during my childhood, and further description on following pages will reveal some of those. But my years with Mom were cut short with her passing far too early. She was not quite fifty-seven when a malignant brain tumor took her life on earth; sending her to the arms of Jesus. I was still living at home until entering military service at age nineteen. When I finished my four-year enlistment, I had little more than a year to be with her before she passed.

The paramount characterization of my mother is undoubtably her penchant for being happy. She enjoyed her family even during the tough times and looked forward to visitation by kith or kin. Even those times when she would have nothing more to serve her guests than room-temperature Kool-Aid and store-bought cookies.

She was the one to initiate a living-room sing-along, heartened by the blended voices whether singing acapella or accompanying a group with her piano. When I or my siblings needed correcting, she would provide it. But, let no one dare to cause harm to her brood. Mom was a mother-hen.

Questions:

(1) Describe your mother's work, both in and out of the home. (2) What other interests did she have? (3) What were her hobbies and what did she do for fun?

My Answers:

My mother was never employed as we think of paid work. If she worked out of her immediate household it was to provide assistance when or where a need arose. Once a year, as a family we (she included) would assist in the annual clean-up at the Old Miakka cemetery. If there were a cleaning day at the church building, she was there. She volunteered to help John Ringling's sister (**Ida North** on Bird Key) when Ida re-opened the mansion there. She served as President of the "Navy Mothers Club" in the late 1940's and early 1950's in Sarasota, Florida.

Mom, like her mother before her, was a house-wife and home-maker. Her work was full-time. She saw that my dad and her children had clean clothing, and nourishing food to eat. She (with minimal help from Dad or my sister, the eldest sibling) saw that the house was clean and as tidy as a growing family could maintain it. Making Dads meagre income stretch from one month to the next was another of her managerial duties.

Mom had little time for hobbies or personal "fun" things. She got a lot of satisfaction in seeing that her children were entertained. She had a way of combining play with learning experience. A card-board box, scissors, crayons and a bit of instruction produced playing cards for number games. I learned, early on, how to make an animated toy using a rubber band, a large match stick and a Cannon brand sewing thread spool.

Questions:

(1) Which of your mother's physical and personality characteristics did you
(2) Describe her best qualities.

My Answers:

My mother liked everybody. She could talk to anyone and she had a tendency to trust and see the good side of a person even when she wasn't sure of a darker side. I suppose I have a bit of those tendencies, though probably not to the same degree.

Her most outstanding quality was managing to love everyone equally, not showing favoritism. She was devoted to her husband and children, comfortable in her own skin and content with her lot in mortal life.

Questions:

(1) Describe your mother's traits with which you are least compatible. (2) Did she experience much sadness or tragedy while you were little? (3) How did she deal with it?

My Answers:

I do not think in terms of being less than compatible with my mom's traits. She wanted to see the best in her fellow man. She wanted to see the best in me. I would feel a degree of remorse if I felt any differently toward others; especially my children. Well, perhaps there is an element of gender difference involved. I'm sure her traits were

governed, to a degree, by mothering instincts and softer feminine emotion. I'm sure I find myself having to work a bit harder to reach those goals.

I recall only two days each year when Mom experienced deep sadness; **the birthdate of my eldest brother George Junior, (8/3/1924)** and **the date of his death, 10/27/1930** at six years of age due to the Diphtheria epidemic. For many years, those two days would find her in her rocking chair, (the well-worn piece of furniture she nursed each of her children in). She would rise only when necessary; the rest of the day was hers to spend alone, shedding non-ending tears.

That is one of the first instances of beginning childhood memories. I have a mental pic of me clinging to her knees when the rocking chair was still; wondering why my mama was crying. I don't recall how many years passed until she was able to accept that one of her babies had been taken from her.

Questions:

(1) What is the happiest memory you have of your mother? (2) What is the most
(2) painful memory you have of her?

My Answers:

I'm certain Mom had many "happiest" days, such as the presence of her boys returning safely from military tours, and her only daughter's graduation from college. One of the things she looked forward to was the day she could travel and see some of the USA.

A young marriage, childbearing, the depression years, and wartime all were contributing factors that allowed a stay-at-home existence for the most part. I recall her happiness on two separate occasions. One, when I was partly instrumental in seeing that she could visit my sister and her grandchildren in Kansas City, Missouri.

The second was an auto trip to the Mountains in North Carolina. She enjoyed the sights, sounds, and aromas in new and differing places.

Mom experienced medical symptoms in the early days of cancer diagnosis that her local doctors (Sarasota Memorial Hospital) could not find an answer for. A sudden loss of sight in her right eye, facial drooping that appeared then diminished, and eventually the loss of other bodily functions.

It required transporting her to Shands Teaching Hospital in Gainesville, Florida before a proper diagnosis was made: **inoperable malignant brain tumor**. Learning that she had an undetermined time to live, even on life support (hoping for some curative breakthrough in research) was painfully devastating.

That occurred more than sixty-five years ago and I still feel approaching tears when I remember my last conversation with her before she lapsed into a three-month coma. "Mom, I love you"! Speechless, with closed eyes, her response was to slide her index finger across my hand; the only part of her body she could move.

Chapter 2

Questions:

(1) Tell about your mother's spiritual or religious beliefs. (2) If she is deceased, how and when did she die? Where is she buried?

My Answers:

Mom lived a life of love. She lived her life with a firm hope of Heaven. She not only read her Bible; she read and told the Bible stories with we children sitting on the floor around her feet. Attendance at worship services and other gatherings of the church was taken as an indelible part of her life, and ultimately, her children. She and Dad had friends and relatives in six separate congregations of the church of Christ, even as far away as Sebring, Florida. Mom did not just practice religion; she was faithful in her love of all things God and Christian living.

Mom breathed her last at Shands Hospital in Gainesville, Florida on **September 10, 1959**, just two months shy of her fifty-seventh birthday. She is interred in Old Miakka Cemetery, Florida.

Questions:

(1) What are the most important things you learned from your mother? (2) What else do you remember about her?

My Answers:

My mother lived her life in a servant's role, seldom asking for attention to her own needs. She would see that Dad and all her children were served before she sat to eat. Even to the point of having the smallest piece of meat at mealtime, or drinking the "pot liquor" from the turnip greens because she made sure others had their fill first.

Her wardrobe, over her lifetime, was minimal. If she had a new dress, it was usually one she had hand-sewn on her treadle Singer sewing machine. And then, If she had saved enough pennies to purchase two or three yards of fabric and a new spool of cotton thread. Of all the many things she taught me, perhaps just being happy with what one has, is the most important.

Mom saw the beauty of so many simple things. She enjoyed sunrises and sunsets, especially over the Gulf, or Sarasota Bay waters. She loved sunshiny days but equally as

well she liked somber gray shades of a rainy day, and saw the beauty of a thunder storm; even when lightning was flashing.

Money was always in short supply. She seldom had any except for what she purposed for each Saturday at the grocery store. I recall one occasion when she complained on the way home because the groceries had cost over seven dollars that week. Shopping for sewing needles, thread, or other sundries was accomplished usually with the few coins she would have tied in the corner of a "hanky" tucked into the nether regions of her purse, and doled out cautiously. Yet, somehow, when I turned eight years of age and joined the Cub Scouts, she would find a dime for my monthly dues.

The year I turned sixteen, the gasoline motor on her washing-machine gave up the ghost. I re-engineered the mounting to allow a small electric motor to operate the handwringer washer. (electricity had finally been installed in our humble house) I remember yet, the happy look on Mom's face and the joy of washing without the noise and exhaust fumes from the gasoline motor. She said she was as happy as she was the day she first got the Maytag washer and was able to give up her Sunyland washboard!

Questions:

(1) Has your father shared any stories he knew about his parents' childhoods? When and where was your father born? (3) Where did he grow up?

My Answers:

If Dad knew, or remembered anything of his parent's childhood, it was not made known to me. He knew his mother was born in Georgia, USA. But she was deceased when he was only nine years old. He, being the eldest child, was required to care for his younger brothers and was not present when she was buried. He was never certain where she had been interred. Seven years later, his dad, (Joseph Cemore) remarried. During that interval, Dad was charged with most of the caring of his younger siblings.

Early family history proffered the notion that his dad was born on Prince Edward Island, Canada. Dad did not know whether that was inaccurate. He was aware of his dad's passing in 1929 in Phoenix, Arizona, but did not know of the exact location. Genealogy searches in subsequent years have provided answers to those questions, but this writer has no knowledge of my paternal grandparent's childhood before their marriage in 1892.

My grandfather was born in New Brunswick, Canada on May 7, 1870. It is possible that he spent time with relatives on Prince Edward Island prior to the family move to Maine, USA. But for me, his history begins with his marriage to **Agnes Virginia Smith** in Florida on **March 21, 1892**; at age twenty-two.

Dad was born in Anthony, Florida, approximately seven miles north of Ocala, Florida. His birth came three days short of one year after his dad and mother were married. Hospitals and doctors were few and far apart in Florida in 1893. I feel certain that Dad was born at home on **March 17, 1893**, with a mid-wife possibly in attendance.

Only a year or so passes and Dad is given a baby brother in **Arcadia, Florida** in eastern Manatee County. Dad will spend his earliest years there and two additional brothers will be added to the family role. Nothing is known of those years, and Dad probably did not start his first year of school until another move was made to **The Myakka City area**. Dad's only sister, **Annie Victoria Betts**, was born there on July 2, 1902. Her mother (and Dad's) died from complications twenty days later, on July 22, 1902.

Dad's childhood was evidently somewhat shortened due to the loss of his mother. And the absence of his dad (my grandfather) from home much of the time due to the need for wage earning to sustain room and board for the children (four boys and one baby girl). So, Dad had to grow up fast.

As previously mentioned, Dad's role became that of surrogate parent for his younger siblings. However, some provision was made for his ability to eventually receive an eighth-grade education in the one-room school house near Oglesby Creek.

By the time Dad was six he was entrusted with leading the pair of family oxen to the water trough and other responsible duties. By age eight, he was allowed to drive the team and wagon.

Questions:

(1) Tell about the family in which your father grew up. (2) Do you know what his childhood was like? Do you remember any stories he told you about it?

My Answers:

Timber and sawmilling became a family endeavor with Dad and some of his brothers working together bringing large cypress logs from the swamps as they grew into manhood. Trips to town for supplies were family affairs on occasion.

Dad said he learned to cook (to some degree) as a result of taking a role in caring for his siblings. He had chores such as cutting stove and fireplace wood, filling the kerosene lamps for household lighting, etc. He learned to milk the cow early in his childhood. He was "farmed out" on occasion as he grew into his teen years; usually for the purpose of farm labor.

Once, returning from a work-week away from home, he was riding a mule with burlap bag only as a saddle. Tired and half-asleep he encountered a rattlesnake on the trail in the deep woods. The mule shied, reared, and Dad slid backward off the mule's rear quarters. When he hit the ground his right arm snapped, the bone cleanly broken.

Dad was able to kill the snake, catch the mule farther down the trail, and find a pine stump that aided his ability to remount. He rode another mile or two home, where his dad and step-mother reset the bone and bandaged his arm with a splint. The nearest doctor was in Old Manatee, approximately twenty-five miles away. Dad was fourteen years old on that occasion.

Walking to school through pristine Florida landscape was a challenge he shared with his peers in their one-room school-house years. In the rainy season, the streams and creeks would be running fast and too deep to cross without disrobing and wading across, holding

clothing high overhead. Adding to the necessity for being vigilant and cautious, was the ever-present realization that Florida Black Bear, Panther, and Alligators existed in the area in numbers that exceeded the human population. Dad spoke of encounters with wildlife often, including very large Diamondback Rattlesnakes.

Questions:
What memories do you have of your father during your childhood days?

My Answers:

My first memories of Dad were when I was very young. I was always underfoot, as he put it. I spent many hours with him in the Ringling Nursery on Longboat Key. That was his work place as **horticulturist** for almost forty years. I learned much of what it took to propagate landscape plants and trees, during those early days of my life. Many times, we trimmed the hundreds of different plants he had planted and maintained around the **Ringling Home** and **Ringling Art Museum**. I was with him when he visited the Bispham Dairy or the Circus Winter Quarters for a trailer load of manure to mix with dirt to use for planting material. I trailed along the time when the mule got loose and went swimming in the Gulf waters to avoid mosquito stings!

Dad let me drive our 1934 Chevrolet, at first sitting on his lap and just steering. When I was ten years of age, I drove the car with him in the passenger seat.

My dad was a patient and quiet man, dedicated to his work and strong in his spiritual conviction. He loved his children; he adored my mother. He would often have a special flower or blossom in his hand for her at days end after work in the nursery.

Dad used no coarse language. I over-heard someone say about my dad, "George Betts wouldn't say (*#+&^), if he had a mouth full!

Questions:
(1) What kind of work did your father do? (2) What other interests did he have?
(3) What were his hobbies and what did he do for fun?

My Answers:

In his younger years, Dad was a carpenter, from a family of carpenters. But his profession became that of a horticulturist. He began work with **Reasoners Nursery**, located in Oneco, Florida. That was soon after his marriage to Mom in 1921. **John Ringling** (of circus and land development fame) hired Dad in 1925 to begin, and manage, the **Ringling Nursery** on Longboat Key. Dad retired in 1965.

Small wages, the Great Depression, and wartime did not deter his love of growing and maintaining the nursery over all those years. He, like my mother, was content with what he had: a big family and a profession he enjoyed.

Someone once said Dad could plant a fence post and it would take root and grow. There was really no end to the hours we spent working together, just me and my dad.

Dad's hobby was directly connected with his work. In addition to landscaping shrubs and trees, he had a perpetual vegetable garden in production that was especially helpful and appreciated during the lean years of the "Great Depression." Socializing with church friends and his relatives was the basis of his "fun."

Questions:

(1) Which of your father's physical and personality characteristics did you inherit? (2) Describe his best qualities.

My Answers:

Physically, I took after Mom's side of the family. I attained six feet of height. Dad was never more than five feet six inches, as I recall. Mom was one or two inches taller than Dad. Maybe a bit more in her dress shoes. In his senior years, Dad had wavy silver hair and his eyes were blue on sunny days, grey when the sky was cloudy. My brown eyes often appeared to have a bit of blue/green cast, and my hair, like Dads, is still full and wavy. Dad was averse to dissension or controversy. I inherited his desire for peace and tranquility.

He was honest to a fault. His strongest virtue was integrity in all his earthly dealings. He had a father's love for his wife and family. In addition, he loved all babies, and he had a special place in his heart for toddlers. He did not use bad language, chew or smoke tobacco, nor drink anything stronger than iced tea, coffee or lemonade.

Questions:

(1) Describe your father's traits with which you are least compatible. (2) Did he experience much sadness or tragedy while you were little? (3) How did he deal with it?

My Answers:

I am probably a bit less accepting of some folk's opinions than Dad was. I am reasonably "live and let live," but he was demonstrably so. He was the epitome of meek and lowly servant to his fellow man.

Dad's grief for deceased friends or family members was evident, especially his wayward sibling brothers. Undoubtedly the most tragic loss in his life was the death of my mother. She was his beloved wife for almost forty years.

Questions:

(1) What is the happiest memory you have of your father? (2) What is the most painful memory you have of him?

My Answers:

Dad spent the last year of his life with me and my family, and our full house must have cramped his style somewhat. But I have memories of him working in his garden with a contented look on his face happily tying up tomato vines.

Which was greater? I'm uncertain. Was it my happiness, or his, at seeing him doing what he had enjoyed throughout his lifetime. Watching him conceal a bag of candy behind his back with a grin on his face was a pleasant memory experienced on many occasions. When he returned from a trip to town, he did not fail to purchase a bag of some confection for my baby daughter **Kristi**; to be shared of course, with her siblings.

When Mom was diagnosed with cancer and Dad finally accepted the fact she had little time to live, he was dismayed and totally heart-broken. He was still employed and working at the nursery five days each week, unable to stay in Gainesville. My brothers and/or I had been visiting Mom each weekend, driving Dad with us so he could spend Saturday and Sunday at Mom's bedside.

She was deep in a coma for several weeks before he realized she would never return to wakefulness. It was taking a toll on his health. He grudgingly agreed to cease making the three-hour drive just to have his grief compounded with each visit. My most painful memory is the look on his face as we prepared to leave. At the doorway to her room, he turned to face her inert form. She was still breathing and her heart still pumping, but only with the help of life-support machinery. His loss of composure was heart-rending.

Almost sixty-six years have passed since that moment, and my tears are near as I complete this page. Perhaps I inherited more from Dad than I have ever thought.

Questions:

(1) Tell about your father's spiritual or religious beliefs. (2) If he is deceased, how and when did he die? (3) Where is he buried?

My Answers:

He loved the people that made up our church. His precious brothers and sisters were followers of the teachings of Jesus. They prayed, as did he, for daily assistance from the Holy Spirit of God the Father. Dad had no doubts that God was the creator of everything that exists, even all of humanity.

Dad was a lifelong member of the church of Christ. The building was not the church; it was only the place for believers to meet. He served as a deacon. But that, to him was just a name. He was only a servant to his fellow man, as he had been since he accepted Jesus as his savior.

At age eleven he was attending services in the Oneco congregation when it was established in 1904. The congregation in Sarasota moved from 12th Street to Golf and Links Street in Sarasota in 1941. Dad helped in the construction of the building at that location as well as the Fruitville location many years later.

A prayer of thanks for our food was expressed at every meal in our home. And Dad read his Bible almost daily for all his years. He visited and prayed with John, the black man that pumped gas and cleaned Dad's windshield for many years. John was dying from cancer and asked for Dad to visit and pray for him. Having a true spirit was more important

than being considered religious. And the Holy Bible was all one needed in print. Everything else was in one's heart.

Dad was hanging a door for my sister, Anna Louise, on a hot summer day. He experienced a heart attack and was taken to Sarasota Memorial Hospital, in Sarasota, Florida. A week later, still in the hospital, another heart vessel burst and he passed away on **September 3, 1967**. He was interred next to Mom in the **Old Miakka Cemetery**.

Questions:

(1) What are the most important things you learned from your father? (2) What else do you remember about him?

My Answers:

Man was born to work. Dad understood the biblical meaning of that. He accepted that reality and took it a step further, passing the exhortation to me. His words were, "Any job worth doing, is worth doing well!" I learned many practical things from my dad. How do I call any one of them more important than another? Born into the days of handshake agreements, he said; "Don't assume much debt, be honest, be known for your integrity, be as good as your word."

Dad had a dry sense of humor that was manifested in short, simple ditties that he had memorized, mostly from school days I suppose, when he was learning from the **McGuffey Readers** [a popular series of educational books in the 1910s through the 1930s]. That and doing lessons on a slate [like a chalk board]. Though somewhat small of stature, he was as big as all outdoors. I think a lot of his physical strength came from years of hard labor saturated with determination.

Questions:

(1) How did your mother and father meet? (2) How long did they know each other before getting married? (3) What do you know about their courtship and wedding? (4) What was their relationship like?

My Answers:

It was Sunday morning and the service had just begun; the simple, unpainted building was where folks met to worship. The sign over the door was inscribed; **"Oneco church of Christ."** The first acapella song had just begun. When the singing reached the chorus, the hymn was composed with a "bass run." Fifteen-year-old **Mary Loretta Shawl** turned to look behind her when she heard a rich bass voice that stood out above others. She always stuck to her story of being able to feel someone staring at the back of her head.

George Emory Betts, was guilty of admiring her long black hair from two pews farther back, and admitted to returning the young girls smile as their eyes met in that moment.

Following his short enlistment in the First World War, they were married on **January 28, 1919**. He was 25 years old, and would be twenty-six years of age in less than two months. She had celebrated her sixteenth birthday only two months ago!

Before entering the U.S. Army, Dad had asked for the privilege of courting the young lady. Grandpa Shawl had granted Dad's request, I am told, reluctantly in regard to the almost ten-year age difference. Following his release from military duty, Dad returned to the family home at Parmalee, near Myakka City. His mode of transportation when courting Mom was a borrowed mule, maybe a horse on some occasions. The distance from his home to the Shawl home in west Bradenton was twenty-five or thirty miles, depending on which trail you took and how much rain had fallen since the last visit.

My memory and family records fail to tell me the location of the marriage ceremony, but I expect it was at the church building in Oneco, Florida. They were either gifted, or loaned, a Model T Ford rag-top-auto for their honeymoon trip to St. Petersburg, Florida via the auto ferry that crossed the route presently occupied by the Sunshine Skyway. Dad wore his military uniform for the wedding ceremony and later for wedding pics. My daughter Sue now has the original matching photos; the old-fashioned style with oval frames and raised glass covering.

Mom and Dad were inseparable. I am reasonably certain that the only time they were apart for more time than it took for the stork to deliver her babies, was the two weeks Dad spent in Venice, Florida during WWII. He volunteered to help when carpenters were needed to construct barracks for the Army Air Corp flight training facility.

Questions:

(1) Does your family have any history of a particular illness, disease, genetic problem, or addiction that could be passed on from generation to generation? (2) Does your family have any family myths or traditions?

My Answers:

Both of my maternal and paternal grandparents were afflicted with **asthma**. That malady seemingly passed on to the second family of his children from Grandpa Joseph Betts.

A history of **heart disease** has permeated throughout the family tree. **Cancer** has been present in at least three generations, in different forms; brain tumor, lung, spine, and prostate. Sadly, whether addiction or not, **alcohol was consumed excessively** by some family members. Not my dad or mom! They did not drink alcoholic beverages, nor did they smoke or chew tobacco in any of its forms. Annual family reunions were the "go-to" anticipated event for many years.

Chapter 3

Questions:

(1) When and where were you born? (2) Was there anything unusual about your birth? (3) Do you know why you were given your name? Does it have a special meaning? (4) What was your birth order among your siblings?

My Answers:

In 1932, Sarasota was still a small town. Growth had become basically stagnated like most of the world suffering through the "Great Depression." The small **Halton Hospital** still existed and the **Sarasota Memorial Hospital** had been in existence since 1925. But **Doctor Cribbens** had delivered one or two of my next older siblings in his home "birthing room". I was no exception.

I was born on February 9, 1932. I'm not sure how many days passed until I was brought home to Longboat Key. But I recall Mom's story of being concerned with keeping me warm in my first two or three weeks. Our home, like so many of that era, was not heated or air conditioned. She spoke of heating the kitchen oven and holding me in the warmth of the open door. A few months later that year, a tidal wave brought Sarasota Bay up close to the back door of our home.

I might have picked a different name for myself, if I'd had the privilege, (Disney's Donald Duck and I were birthed within months of each other). But as it turned out, Donald means leader, and, Earl denotes nobility. I'm not sure either applies to me, but after this long a life, I am OK with it.

I was Mom's fifth delivery from the Stork. She would add my two younger brothers, **William on June 7,1934** and **Kenneth**, just one year later on **June 16, 1935**.

Questions:

(1) What stories have you been told about yourself as a baby? (2) What are your earliest memories of your childhood?

My Answers:

If there was anything worth telling in regard to my time as a baby, I am not aware of it. There is no one still living that would have any knowledge of my time as a baby.

Concerning my earliest memories, I can only recall rather insignificant scenes. One such memory was my being held by teenage girls on the front pew at church services. Another is being held in my mother's arms close to the living-room window during a fierce thunderstorm while she explained the power of our Creator.

And then there was my learning to ride my sister's antique bike long before I was big enough to reach the seat. I do recall climbing the Australian Pine trees to the very top, some forty feet above the ground. And I remember following my mom to the clothesline to hang out clothes to dry or to retrieve washed clothes that had dried. I was her "clothes-line up and down operator", using the pole for that purpose. (Folks today have no conception of those clothes drying practices). I also recall helping Dad in the nursery. And riding the school bus during those early years. That's about it for my favorite recollections.

Questions:

(1) Do you consider your childhood happy? (2) Why or why not? (3) What were you like as a child?

My Answers:

I consider my childhood a very happy time. Perhaps my feeling stems from the pleasant surroundings of Gulf, Bay, and natural flora and fauna. Perhaps it was the fact that I found enough to do that kept me from being "bored," as I hear too often from some around me in today's environment.

Even though I found things to do collectively with my siblings, or with friends or kin that would sometimes visit, I considered myself as a loner. Well, not totally. I just enjoyed my own company and the things that I found to do, both indoor and outdoor. Climbing trees was an especially pleasing out-door activity. Indoors, I read every book I could get my hands on. I enjoyed building balsa-wood model airplanes. With no feeling of self-aggrandizement, I remember my parents speaking of my self-sufficiency.

I had no fear of the water. I would spend hours swimming alone in the Gulf; often in deep water father offshore than would be considered prudent in this time of shark attacks along Florida's shoreline. The bay was a draw for me and my homemade rowboat.

Questions:

(1) Describe the home(s) and neighborhood(s) in which you grew up. (2) Describe your family's economic conditions and the other factors that affected your lifestyle.

My Answers:

On page 47 of the book, I provided some of the information asked for here. The year I was born, and many years thereafter, we were the only family living on the island property owned by John Ringling or his estate. That was primarily, the southern half of Longboat Key.

There was only one unoccupied house in our vicinity, (owned by a Dr. Cole that resided somewhere out of state). Mangroves bordered the bay-shore to the east of our humble home, approximately three-hundred yards away.

To the south, beyond the nursery "green-house ", a thick jungle of trees, bushes and vines covered many acres of the landscape. Beyond that, a forest of Florida Red Cedar trees covered the sand and shell earth in all stages of growth. Our Christmas tree was provisioned from there each year.

To the west lay the overgrown layout of the Golf Course that was almost complete when construction of the **John Ringling Ritz Hotel** ceased at the beginning of the Great Depression years.

The gulf coast was lined with pristine Sabal (cabbage) Palms and many Coconut Palms, planted to add to the beauty of the natural surroundings. For a few months during World War II, soldiers in the US Army Signal Corp occupied the jungle area between our house and the Gulf beach.

Like most other folks we were affected by the depression years. Dad's wages were about average for our area. Fifty dollars a month based on a five-and-a-half-day work week. The war years were affected as much by shortages of necessities as was the wants and needs during the depression. Dad's vegetable garden was a blessing that offset some of the food shortages during both eras.

Questions:

Tell about your brothers and sisters, as well as step-siblings, and your relationships with each of them when you were little.

My Answer:

My sister, **Anna Louise Betts**, was ten years my senior. I do not doubt she was some help to Mom in caring for me and my two younger brothers. Mom would have had her hands full with **Billy** and **Kenny** both in diapers at the same time. Sis was very studious and studied long and hard, probably to the future detriment to her eyesight. She graduated from college before we had electric lighting available in our home. She had studied all her school years by the light of a kerosene lamp. Her age and activities precluded much interaction during, at least, her four youngest brothers time of remembered development.

When we were toddlers, much of our play was done collectively with the usual differences and momentary wants and wishes. Teen years brought more time spent with kin or school "buddies" in activities that were not as inclusive.

The overriding factor that seemed paramount over any differences was the fact that we were family. We were close-knit simply due to not having neighbors right down the street. So, we played together amicably.

Questions:

(1) Did you go to nursery school or kindergarten? What do you remember about it? (2) Describe your first elementary school. (3) What was your first day there like?

My Answers:

Nursery school or kindergarten was unavailable in Sarasota when I was of that age. I began the **first grade** of elementary education in **the fall of 1937**. I recall being with my mother when she registered me for my first semester beginning that year at Central Elementary School in downtown Sarasota. The school was opened for classes twelve years prior, along with two other elementary school's; Bay-Haven and Southside.

My first day was scary. I had to ride seven miles on the school bus with my next older brother **Harry**. I seem to recall he did not wish to be seen with a younger brother and I was required to sit beside someone I did not know.

Beyond that, I remember nothing about that first day

Questions:

(1) What memories do you have about getting to and from school? (3) When you got home from school each day, who was there to greet you? (3) What was the first thing you usually did after school?

My Answers:

I did not mention my older brother, Bob Betts, earlier. He was beginning junior high school the year I began first grade. It would have really been embarrassing for him to acknowledge my presence (puny 1st grader brother) amongst his older friends on the bus. I'm almost certain I would have been totally ignored by my brothers.

Our school bus was small. It was a 1934 12-passenger Chevrolet bus. And it was still in use in my high school years. **Misses Williams**, a high-school math teacher, lived at the north end of Longboat Key, and served as bus driver for the kids on LBK. She would stop at the front of our house, and would toot the horn if we were not outside waiting. I recall those mornings when one of us would run so as not to be left behind, often with shoes and/or belt in hand. Sometimes with an unfinished bowl of cereal back inside on the dining

table. The route to town crossed New Pass Bridge and the wooden bridges of the Ringling Causeway.

Our road-side mailbox was the point of return when we de-bussed on our return from the school day. Mom was always at home to greet any or all of us. That covered a spate of years. Sis started school in 1927, and Kenny was the last to graduate in 1954.

My favorite thing to do after returning home from school varied of course from one time to the next, but always included a hug for Mom. But, during one phase, I would fill a bowl with Ritz crackers, smush them a bit, pour raw honey over them and eat with a spoon while reading from whatever book I possessed at the time. If the Ritz crackers were not available, I might head for the garden, pull a tomato or carrot and see what Dad was doing at the nursery.

Questions:

(1) Tell about your favorite or least favorite teachers. (2) What was your favorite subject? Why? (3) Did you ever receive an award or recognition for special achievement?

My Answers:

My favorite teacher in elementary school was **Misses Miller**. Mom said I was Misses Miller's favorite student. She gave me special things to do, like cleaning the bird-bath outside during class time, or taking the chalk erasers to the custodian's room to clean. Fun things that took expertise such as passing out graded papers or mimeographed test sheets.

Another first-grade teacher, **Misses White**, may have been a good teacher but she had a mean streak. A kid named **Robert Godwin** brought a small piece of pine limb in from the play-ground. When he did not stop raking the limb across the steam radiator (he liked the sound), she took the stick from him and, it broke into pieces as she used it to rap him across his head and shoulders. I observed that take place with a sense of awe and trepidation. From then on, I was always careful to stay away from her presence, especially if I had anything in my hand that resembled a stick.

My favorite subjects were **English** and **History**, equally. I liked spelling bees after I recovered from following a stream of my class-mates mis-spelling the simple word potato. I vowed to not let that happen again; getting caught up in others mistakes. I was, as best I can recall, just a fairly average student. I finished high school (I think) 43rd in my graduating class of 172.

Questions:

(1) Do you remember the occurrence of any significant historic event(s) during your elementary school days? (2) Which friends do you best remember and why? (3) What games and activities did you enjoy?

My Answers:

I believe I was in the fifth grade of elementary school when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and the world seemed to change forever. The events of **World War II** (1941-1945) were educational and historically etched into my mien. I can still hear the voices of our **President Franklin D. Roosevelt** and England's **Prime Minister Winston Churchill** on our battery-powered radio.

I was never a "clique" sort of guy. In all my grades of school I had many friends. Perhaps there were more that were friendly acquaintances than tried and true friends, but I did not think of any of my peers as being outside my "circle."

I named my son **Gordon Thomas Betts** after long time school chums **Gordon Earl Blackstock** and **John Thomas Montgomery**.

I began first grade with **Bill Kennedy**, **Bill Phillips**, **Billy Hathcock**, and **Ronnie Montressor**. I graduated with friends **Hartford Lamb**, **Bobby Smith**, **Devit Adams**, and a multitude of boys and girls that I thought of as fellow travelers on the road of life. I enjoyed everything that happened "today", and looked forward to tomorrow's activities.

Questions:

(1) Tell about the first motion picture you ever saw. (2) What were your favorite radio and television shows? (3) Did you have any pets? What were they? What were their names? How important were they in your life.

My Answers:

The first movie I ever saw was probably a western. That would have been; the old-style shoot-um-ups on the silver screen. They were so noisy they gave you a headache if you sat down too close to the big screen down front. Those were black and white films shown on Saturdays, usually with a matinee and only cost nine cents. The first memorable movie for me (in color) was: **"Gone With The Wind"** (1939) starring Clark Gable, Vivian Leigh (Oscar for "Best Actress"), Olivia de Havilland, and Hattie McDaniel (Oscar for "Best Supporting Actress"; 1st black to win an Oscar). The director, Victor Flemming, won an Oscar for "Best Director." And an Oscar for "Best Adapted Screenplay," given posthumously to Sidney Howard because he died just before the voting. And, of course, the picture itself received an Oscar for "Best Picture" of 1939.

Since we had no electricity in our home until 1941, Dad had purchased a Zenith table-model radio. It was powered with a large six-volt dry-cell battery that was not rechargeable, and would only last for sixty hours or so. Dad and I liked the same programs. "Fibber MacGee and Molly," "Amos n" Andy," "Red Skelton," and of course the news casts during the war years.

During the depression years, a pet dog was an unacceptable expense for many families. Later in life when we children were no longer residing with Mom and Dad, they

had two different pups for a while. One was a Dachshund. The other was a small mixed breed Mom called "Tippy".

When I was about twelve years of age, someone dropped-off a streaky gray kitten that I was allowed to keep. When it was fully grown it would jump from the ground to my shoulders, content to stay there while I rode my bike. It did not matter where I rode, or for how long, "Streaky" would ride with me.

Questions:

(1) Did you ever have a special place where you went to be alone? (2) What did you daydream about? (3) What were your favorite things to eat? Are there any smells, flavors, sounds, songs, etc., that bring back memories of your childhood.

My Answers:

I spent many hours alone. I was sometimes in a tree-top down near the bay, or at times in my sailboat far from shore. I swam alone in the gulf, sometimes even when the breakers were far too fearsome to be swimming in.

I explored the deep woods and open spaces where the gopher turtles and rabbits were. I'm not sure I "daydreamed." I just enjoyed my "here and now," and who I was at the moment.

What's not to like if it tastes good? I liked everything when I was a child, and never grew out of that mentality. Some things, of course, were special back in my childhood. Mom was good at making whatever she had to cook, taste good. Buttery scallop stew, Gopher and dumplings, fried mullet, swamp cabbage, guava shortcake, stewed prunes, fried rabbit with rice and brown gravy, and tomato gravy over white rice. You name it, everything was great. I don't need anything to kindle the memory of good things to eat. I've never forgotten.

Questions:

(1) What birthday do you remember most? Why? (2) How did you spend your summers? Where did your family go on vacations? What is your most memorable vacation?

My Answers:

There are two or three birthdays that stand out as special in my lifetime. The first was when I turned nine. I do not remember any before that. I know my mom always baked a fresh **coconut cake** for any and all of the family birthdays. But the nine-year celebration was the only childhood birthday that warranted a party. Mom arranged a party in our humble home that included a few of my classmates. Yes, coconut cake, and Kool-Aid to

drink without ice. No ice-cream, either. Remember, we still did not have electricity. My gifts were Great Depression oriented. One classmate gave me a Dixon Ticonderoga # 2 pencil. Another brought a ten-page sheaf of lined notebook paper. I also received a used protractor and a wooden twelve-inch ruler. I seem to recall my mother giving me a small book of some description but that recollection is hazy. Mom did the best she could under the circumstances.

My Judy honored me with a very special celebration the year I turned **eighty-five.** It was a "Gala" with a multitude of guests, and many of my children and grandchildren helped in various ways to make the evening very memorable. The food and gifts were far beyond my deserving. My wife has always made my birthdays special, but this one was a humdinger!

Summers on Longboat Key were always great, during the youngster, preteen, or teen years. I do not remember much except the freedom to swim, roam, build forts under the Washingtonian Palms, picking and eating wild Sea-grapes, or just hanging out bare-footed and happy. I repeat myself when I say: I was never bored on the long summer days. I do not recall a single day in which I could not find a way to pass the time to my satisfaction.

When I was twelve years old, I accompanied my Aunt Minnie on a train ride to the farm of cousins in **Ohio**. I repeated the experience three times in subsequent years, staying and working on the farm during the summer months.

It was that same farm that we had visited as a family when I was five years of age. The trip was made in Dad's **Model A Ford sedan**. Highways and travelling accommodations were radically different when compared to 2025. That one falls into the most memorable family vacation because it was **the only one** until I drove Mom and Dad to Kansas and back in 1949.

Question:

Describe how important religion was to your family when you were little.

My Answer:

Some folks might say, "Well, there wasn't much else to do, so people went to church for entertainment or socializing with other folks that they didn't get to see during the work week."

Not so with our family. Mom and Dad studied their bibles. I can still recall a picture of my dad after a hard day's work, finished with his supper, and sitting in the corner of the living room, reading by the light of a kerosene lamp. Mom read bible stories to us when we were old enough to pay attention, sitting on the floor around her feet.

Until I left home for military service, we attended worship service morning and evening on Sunday. Wednesday, we attended bible study in the evening and again on Thursday for singing practice.

Prayer of thanks at meal time was important and seldom neglected. Dad's carpentry skill came in handy on two occasions when additional space was needed for growing congregations. **Dad helped to build the Sarasota and the Fruitville meeting places of the church of Christ.**

Spirit filled congregational singing was notable in years past with voices blended in **four-part harmony**. Dad had a deep bass voice; Mom was a pretty alto.

Questions:

(1) What part did religion play in your social activities? (2) Which religious holidays were celebrated in your home? Describe.

My Answers:

Jesus blessed and ate food with his apostles, and others, on many occasions. Undoubtedly more times than we read about in Holy scripture. The togetherness exemplified there is a pattern for His followers today, a practice that was a part of our family life. Many meals and family get-togethers were enjoyed in our home as well as homes of family and friends where Jesus and God the Father's name was invoked in prayer. Or some other form of spiritual acknowledgement was voiced. Sharing Christian principles should be the mindset of participants in any facet of social activity.

The joy of the "Christmas season" was always celebrated in our home, but not with a different sense of importance above the daily expression of thanks for the birth of Jesus. After all, He is our personal Savior on any given day!

Questions:

(1) What do you remember about any health epidemics? (2) Were you ever seriously ill when you were little? (3) Did you have any serious accidents as a child?

My Answers:

From ancient history through present day, we are aware of health epidemics. Some were more egregious than others. I suppose the first epidemic that I became aware of in my early childhood, was the one that took the life of my eldest brother, **George Emory Betts, Jr.** At just six years and a couple of months of age, he contracted the dreaded **Diphtheria disease** that plagued the USA from 1921 through 1925.

I experienced some of the medical maladies like so many children born in the era of pre-vaccination and virus fighters in common use today. **Mumps**, **measles**, **chicken-pox**, and various forms of **influenza** were all common diseases that affected so many kids during my childhood. I was not immune to any of those, but was evidently blessed with mild cases. As an added blessing, I recall having to endure the pain and discomfort of three or four **boils** in my pre-teen years.

I have survived my lengthy years without a broken bone. That is undoubtedly a miracle, for my adventurous years often placed me in positions conducive to serious accidents. Tree climbing, bicycle stunts, jumping from the edge of the house roof, and acrobatics of differing sorts are just a few of the fun things that could have contributed to some painful incidents. I did manage to accumulate my share of scratches, cuts, bruises, scorpion bites, and the like.

Questions:

(1) Did you experience a family tragedy during childhood? How did it affect you?
(2) Did anything unusual or strange happen to you during your childhood?

My Answers:

"Tragic" and "tragedy" were probably not words in my vocabulary in my early childhood. Observing my best friend (at the time) run into traffic and collide with an automobile that put him in the hospital for two weeks was disconcerting to say the least.

The drowning loss of a teenager in one of our church family (**my brother Bob's friend**) was upsetting. At ten or eleven years of age, I stood in our back-yard and watched as two war planes collided overhead with parts falling on two sides of our frame home.

These were not so much tragic events within our family, but affected me enough that I remember each of those events with clarity. A tragedy with dual effects on my senses was the day I sat beside my dad at the burial of my **Uncle Chester**. Even as a child, I sensed the loss of someone in our family; hearing Dad's grief filled sobs and seeing his flowing tears. Just a few years later, at age thirteen, I would recall his feelings when I attended my grandmother Shawl's interment.

Overall, my childhood was without any serious happenings. Those years passed with a degree of peace and tranquility.

Questions:

(1) What were your greatest fears when you were a child? (2) Did you have any favorite relatives? How were they important to you?

My Answers:

I did not grow up in a fearful setting. Other than common childhood bickering ("Mama, he's pinching me!"), I do not recall being afraid of anything. I was taught that we were not to be fearful. I had loving parents, and I knew I could depend on them to take care of me. I was not afraid of the dark. We played hide and seek in the woods, and many times that was outdoors long after nightfall.

My hours spent alone, even surrounded with ominous clouds and flashing lightning, I knew that Jesus was with me.

I can't seem to think of favorites, when I recall my relatives. Time and distance between the geographic existence of aunts and uncles and grandparents seemed to affect the amount of time spent with one more than another. For no reason other than the aforementioned, I was closer with my cousins in the **Clyde Betts** family and those of my dad-s half-brother, **Herman Betts**. **Elsie Betts** and I shared the same birth-year, and spent some teen time enjoying horse-back, camping, and some work-time activities. **Gerald Betts** (Jerry) and I in sub-teen years were together at times, enjoying escapades in the primeval, unspoiled landscape in and around Oneco, Florida.

Questions:

(1) Tell about the people who influenced you the most during your childhood. (2) What are the most memorable experiences you shared with your grandparents?

My Answers:

Who is more (or better at) influencing of their children than good, caring, parents? I was never exposed to drunkenness, swearing, bickering, or other upsetting scenarios in my childhood. My Dad and Mom both influenced my understanding of the need to be my best. That meant whether it was education, work, ethics, or morality. Through the lens of hindsight, have I been perfect? No. But what would be my condition now in my aged years, if they had not given me the benefit of their understanding of a proper, beneficial, lifestyle?

I was only privileged to be around my maternal grand-parents once every two or three months. A day-trip to Bradenton from Longboat Key in the 1930's and 1940's was primarily different than a trip in today's society. Automobiles, roadways, and lifestyles were decidedly different. War-time restrictions also played a part.

My paternal grand-parents were deceased in 1902 and 1929, before my birth. Grandma and Grandpa Shawl stayed with us for each Christmas. That was usually a whole week at our home. And that was always the high-light of sharing time with them. Although, of course, children were supposed to be seen, not heard.

When Grandma died in 1946, Grandpa lived with us until his death in 1950. Playful "fisticuffs" with him was a daily pastime. He was definitely old-school in his thinking. Boys should not be seen in bathing suits anywhere except upon the beach, and preferably submerged in the water. Girls should not be seen in bathing attire at all, no matter what. He brought up that subject with me one day when I was preparing to leave the house wearing my skimpiest hand-me-down bathing trunks.

Questions:

(1) What is your saddest childhood memory? (2) Tell the story about something funny that happened during your childhood?

My Answers:

Don't get me wrong. I'm sure there were child-hood days with childish feelings of sadness because I was not allowed to do or to have some desired thing. The grief at funerals or gravesites, yes, I'm certain, would have induced sadness. But strangely, I cannot recall a single instance in which I was truly saddened over any superficial happening.

Something funny? Well, hilarious at one point! Dad had bargained to supply a certain number of **coconut palms** for some municipality. He needed to prepare a large field to plant and grow the palms. Uncle Herman had a mule trained to pull a plow. Wow, that was; just what Dad needed due to the lack of a tractor or otherwise mechanical means of digging furrows in which to plant the palms.

Uncle Herman delivered the mule late one afternoon with a bale of hay and a few days' ration of grain. Dad had constructed a small corral to contain the animal when not harnessed for the work at hand. It was a temporary structure. It was mosquito season and at times the little vampires were voracious. Even with the animals and livestock.

I was no more than five years old and guilty of following Dad whenever I was allowed. On the morning after the delivery of the mule, I was with him to "help" get the long-eared animal ready to plow. As we approached the corral, it had a gaping hole on one side. That doggoned mule was nowhere to-be-seen.

I continued to follow as Dad tracked hoof-prints in the sandy landscape all the way to the Gulf beach, at least a half mile away. The hoofprints ended at the water's edge. At this moment I may have asked, "Daddy, did the mule swim to Mexico?" Just them my Dad said, "There that mule is out there."

Out in the deeper water just beyond the sandbar, I could see that mule. The crown between his ears, his eyes, and the repeated snorting of salt-water from his nostrils. He was frightened but managed to keep above the small wavelets. That mule and us, too, were sure thankful for the calmness of the water on that morning.

The rest of his equine body was totally submerged to defray the multitude of "stings" that had caused him to escape from the small, frail corral. It was the look in those oversized eyes, blinking away the salty water, that seemed to say, 'I'm not as dumb as you think I am. I had to do something to get away from those vicious little bugs!' Dad swam out and lead the mule back to dry ground. The work was eventually completed. And we started a special treatment for that mule. We gave him a nightly wipe-down with **Citronella** mixed with some oily coating that cured the problem.

Chapter 4

Questions:

(1) Tell the story about a frightening event from your childhood. (2) What is your happiest childhood memory?

My Answers:

To be frightened denotes the thought of fear. As I've said previously, I don't recall being fearful. However, I must have felt, or shared, the fear my mother would definitely have felt on one occasion. It was the afternoon of Christmas eve day. Dad had little more than completed the installation of the fresh-cut Cedar tree that would stand in the corner of the dining room as our Christmas tree.

I'm not certain of our ages at the time, but Kenney was just a baby, undoubtedly happily crawling on the floor in awe of all that was taking place. Perhaps a momentary lapse in attention to his antics, allowed his ingestion of a small portion of the greenery from the tip of a Cedar twig. He began to choke and gag when the leafy material became lodged in his throat. Dad was unable to remove the obstruction; it was too deep, and Kenny's breathing was inhibited dangerously. A frantic trip of seven miles to town and finding **Doctor Cribbins** in his home/office was the pleasing outcome of a frightening event. I recall watching as the instrument was placed in my baby brothers throat and the plant material removed. Was I frightened? Probably so, in some childish manner. But as I think back over the years and my mother's loss of her first-born baby-boy, I must have realized her fear of losing another child.

I consider my childhood as a happy time despite the lean years of the Great Depression, and undetermined eventualities of wartime. Recalling the happiest memory of all is difficult, perhaps even irrelevant after all is said and done.

I do have a happy memory of an event that I can still recall in detail. It poses a picture of my dad's happiness as much as mine. It was the day that I returned via Trailways bus from my first trip to the farm in Ohio. I'd been away from home for three months and it was the last week of August; school would start on the seventh of September. I had taken a short detour from the direct route from the bus station to the court-house where I knew dad would be. He was not certain what day I was returning home; it would be a surprise. **Earl Blackstock**, a school-chum lived on Morrill Street and he decided to tag along when I told him I would surprise my dad where he was engaged in some landscaping. To shorten

this story of happiness, when Dad saw me approaching, he dropped his shovel and ran to give me a dad's hug. I'm not sure which one of us was the happiest at that moment!

Question:
What other memories would you like to share about your childhood?

My Answer:

My childhood was filled with a myriad of "growing up" activities. Those, if properly penned, would probably be considered as little more than boring minutia to the children in today's world.

I did not possess things that are commonplace to most every child in today's society. I had no TV, no cell-phone or tablet games to play. Not even a dial telephone. I did not have a battery powered electric bike, or skateboard. Not even a regular bike until I was twelve years of age. Nor did I have a new pair of Nike "sneaks" or higher priced Air Jordan "tenny-pumps". When my old ones were badly-worn-enough, I might get a new pair of Ball-brand sneakers that cost only ninety-seven cents per pair. I seldom thought of "playthings" that are so numerous and available to most children today.

So many of those things did not exist in the years of my childhood. Did I despair or feel underprivileged? No way! I was blessed with an adventurous life on Longboat Key, in sunny Florida. I had space to roam. And my parents taught me to make things to play with, if I really had need of such. I made a stick horse, that I rode for years. My brothers and I made our own merry-go-round. I had miles of gulf and bay beach. I could swim, fish, or explore and hunt treasure caught in the Mangrove roots that were so abundant along the bay shore. I could find an unending list of things to do in each era of my youth.

As time passed, I was a "Liberty-boy," selling the ***Liberty*** magazine on the streets of Sarasota. I became a Cub Scout. I camped overnight near New Pass bridge with friends, and we played at night in the ghostly John Ringling Ritz Hotel remains.

I worked with my dad; learning skills I have used all my life. I have been called a "jack-of-all-trades". I make no claim to mastering anything other than a respect for anyone that works hard and enjoys what they do to provide for the reasonable desires and needs of a happy family.

Longboat Key is one of the barrier Islands just west of Sarasota and Manatee counties. The town of Sarasota was quite small in 1932 (the year I was born). Longboat Key was ten miles long and less than a mile wide at any point. For many years, we were the only family living on the south half of the island. Most of the island was covered with pristine growth of Sabal (cabbage) Palms, Australian Pine, Florida Red Cedar, and many other salt tolerant varieties of vegetation.

The John Ringling Ritz Golf Course was recognizable with is waterholes and general layout. However, it was overgrown with native vegetation, in addition to the acres of St. Augustine grass that had been planted on the fairway years earlier. At home, I was only a short walk from Gulf beach or Bayshore. Fish of many varieties were abundant.

Each year, the grass flats in the bay were filled with scallops, easily plucked from the shallow waters.

A few acres of small farming existed in years prior to 1921. A tidal wave wiped out the vegetable crops under cultivation and rendered the sandy soil too salty for replanting. Dad managed to establish and perpetuate a year-round garden for many seasons though, when he moved the family to the island in late 1925.

Until the beginning of the "great depression" in 1929, Sarasota was a growing municipality. Twenty plus years of relative peaceful small-town existence later, developers found the "holy grail" and growth from its growth zoomed from a sleepy village to a busy town to an important city exploding with constant growth. Even today, in 2025, it has no sign of slowing. My teen-years ended in February of 1951. **The U.S. Navy was my home util March ,1955**.

I considered myself an average teen-ager in the day and age. I liked a variety of music. That included some of most all the music genres, but preferring western and light classical. I did my own auto repair and other home repairs or modifications when needed. I enjoyed anything horticultural, especially when working with Dad, and my high-school years in vocational agriculture.

Question:

What do you remember most from your school experiences while a teenager?

My Answers:

My summer away from home at age twelve undoubtedly stirred my thoughts of farming as a way of life. Having fresh eggs and milk daily, and all the other home-grown things to eat in season, was great. Driving the tractors and operating various types of machinery was mentally and physically invigorating. By the end of that summer, I was already being treated as a true farm hand. I can only assume that was my reason for choosing **Vocational Agriculture** as my primary course of education.

I felt at home with all I learned regarding the many aspects of productive farming. I absorbed the "jack-of-all-trades mentality" that is necessary to make a reasonable living for self and family. During those three school years, I served a term as treasurer, and another term as president of our local **Future Farmers of America** (FFA) chapter. I was involved in establishing the landscape nursery that flourished as a chapter source of income for a period of time.

I was also a member of the Sarasota High School **glee club** in my final-three-years of school. I really enjoyed the musical competitions and our travel to various out-of-town functions. I was an "A" and "B" student in all of my subjects each semester. My most outstanding regret regarding my education was allowing, no, make that **causing** myself to earn a **D** in two consecutive grading periods. I liked history and found the class easy. Too

easy. I skipped a few classes. That resulted in my being disqualified for class president. I had been nominated with a firm following, but it was not to be.

I enjoyed school. And I looked forward to the comradery as much as anything each day. I had many school "chums" and acquaintances but avoided the cliques. Sadly, now in July of 2025, most are those dear friends are deceased.

Questions:

(1) Were you involved in extracurricular activities in high school? (2) What was your favorite subject? Why?

My Answers:

I began my part-time work as a sales clerk in the Western Auto store in the middle of my senior year. This did not conflict with my school classes or my studies. And it gave me a few dollars to help with some of the things I was involved in scholastically.

I was an honorary member of the **Key Club** during one semester. One of my favorite extracurricular activities in my junior year was the **Boy's Cooking Club**. I have fond memories of those fun times cooking food in class and over open fire on the beach. Oddly enough, the prettiest teacher in the school was named **Miss McCook**. She always chaperoned our activities, in school and outdoor activities as well. Even sometimes around a bonfire on **Siesta Key beach**.

My favorite subject was the collective classes that were designed to be beneficial to the Vo-Ag program; Ag-math, Ag-English, Ag-history and the like. I declined any further math, thereby having little more than introductory classes of algebra or trigonometry. Most of my classes were considered general in the nature of study.

Questions:

(1) Did you have a favorite teacher in high school? How did she or he influence you? (2) Was religion an important part of your life during your teen years? Explain.

My Answers:

I did not care for the study of words beyond noun, verb, and adjective. Participles and such, still give me a headache. The very term **"English composition,"** as I understand it, gives me something akin to apoplexy!

Yet, here I am in the December of my life using grammar that includes a decided mix of all that **Misses Bennett** spent two semesters trying to get me to understand. Perhaps she was successful to a degree. I am told I often send my readers to their dictionary. **Misses B**, as some called her, and I were not close as sometimes teachers and students were. But,

she was patient and spent a little extra time correcting my errors with understandable explanations. **I think of her now as my favorite.**

She was my eighth grade English teacher, and I have a memory of her that has never left my cognition. Our school was constructed long before the advent of air-conditioning units. Open windows sufficed when cooler air was needed, (or hoped for). Through the open windows of her classroom, several boys were overheard using less than desirable verbiage. (four-letter words of the day). When she popped her head out the window and called the boys in, they did not know what to expect, but knew they were in trouble.

Well, I must confess. I was one of those boys! However, in my defense I had not uttered any of the offensive words that caught her attention. I was guilty by association. She acknowledged that fact after the session. Another aspect of learning that I have retained following that day.

Misses Bennett had a lengthy, albeit kind, oration when class began. And I will shorten mine to say she made just one thing clear: "Boy's, there are enough adjectives in the English language that make the need for those foul words I over-heard to be totally unnecessary." I took that thought to heart that day, and it has been a resource for me throughout my life. It fits definitely with scripture in my Bible: "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits."

As I stated on an earlier page, my Heavenly thoughts lean closer to the meaning of spirituality. More so than the use of the word **religion**, that is more commonly used in today's search for godliness. My desire is to live as directed by my God, "Be Holy as I am Holy."

Jesus is God the Son, and is the answer to all righteousness.

Questions:

(1) Describe any part-time jobs you had in your teen years. (2) What were your favorite leisure activities?

My Answers:

I worked part-time jobs when and where I could. Even part-time jobs lacked stability in my teen years, and were often short-lived. I delivered various food products for **Smith Candy and Specialty Company**. I also worked as a lead-out boy at the **Sarasota Kennell Club** race track. I mowed lawns, hoed planting grass, and helped backfill house foundations, along with tractor mowing of cattle pastures.

My first work where I earned enough money to require tax withholding was as a bag-boy and stocker with the **A & P Grocery Company** store in downtown Sarasota. My pay was 37.5 cents per hour, and I was required to work ten hours on Saturdays. As previously noted, I worked part-time at the **Western Auto Store** on Pineapple Avenue, also in downtown Sarasota before being hired full-time.

When leisure time was my good fortune, I might be found swimming in the Gulf. Or trapping the over-crowded Raccoon population to sell to Dad's workmen, and peddling my bicycle for miles. Or just hanging out with some novel borrowed from the school library. Anything that could be performed out-doors was my favorite. When practicality was an issue, I hunted wild rabbit with my brother Bob's .22 rifle.

Questions:

(1) Describe your best friends during your teen years. (2) Where did you and your friends spend time and what did you do there?

My Answers:

My friends were a mix of pals that began as fellow school-mates in elementary-school. One that I recall began first grade with me and received their diploma from High-school in the same hour I received mine. Loyalty came and went occasionally as character sometimes dictates. But most of my buddies enjoyed the adventures they occasionally shared with me on Longboat Key.

Some were known only from school activities, others from our hours together in church services. We camped out at New Pass and played hide-n-seek in the old ghost of John Ringlings bankrupt hotel on weekends when young teens. Later, we dated (with girls!) at the movies or the **Smack Drive-In** restaurant. **Bill Kennedy** was red haired and skinny. **Bob Smith** was rotund with a shock of unruly hair and a small space between his front teeth. **Jack Austin** burned a pant leg off his new khaki's when he got too close to the campfire on one occasion.

Earl Blackstock lived in the heart of Sarasota, and he delivered the ***Sarasota Herald Tribune*** morning newspaper. I would occasionally stay overnight at his folk's house, and help toss his rolled papers long before daybreak. It was always exciting to take a bike ride downtown in the dark of the wee morning hours. A few years later, **Don Bowden** and I would get almost free rides in small aircraft on Sunday afternoons following church service.

At sixteen years of age, **Hartford Lamb** and I "hitch-hiked" from Sarasota to Winston-Salem, North Carolina and back for Christmas with his family and my (then) girlfriend.

Questions:

(1) Tell me about your first date and first kiss. (2) Tell about your first steady girlfriend or boyfriend. How long were you together?

My Answers:

My first date? My first kiss? Do you really expect an old man of 93 years to remember that? Or own up to such frivolity, if he did? Isn't that the kind of stuff girls remember or write in diary's so they don't forget. And they goad their husbands with later, when they are old and gray?

I do recall a "first steady girlfriend." The one I mentioned earlier. She spent her junior year of high school in Sarasota with relatives. She and I took an instant liking to each other. It was a bit of a Cinderella attraction in reverse though. She came from a family that had considerable wealth. I was the kid that grew up with only one pair of shoes at a time, and seldom had the means for a proper evening out with movie and eats. That did not seem to matter, though. She seemed content and when her parents visited Sarasota, they seemed satisfied with their daughter's choice. Little more than a year later, she said "bye" and returned to North Carolina. And that was the end of that.

Questions:

(1) What were the most mischievous pranks you pulled? (2) What were the attitudes among teenagers about sex, smoking, drugs, and alcohol?

My Answers:

I was not a prank sort of guy. I was a bit cautious when it came to inconveniencing or causing anyone discomfort of any sort. Some kids were inclined to shove a neighbor's out-house over on its side and call it fun. Others delighted in stuffing a potato up the tailpipe of someone's auto with the resulting difficulty in starting or operating the vehicle. To some kids, nothing was as eye-catching and hysterical as a large pair of lady's panties flying from the school flagpole. Maybe I was a dud, but I just seemed to have better things to do.

During my teen years, I recall only two boys and one girl that smoked cigarettes. And for the most part, they had to hide the practice. Two or three boys would drink a bottle of beer if they could manage to procure it. One guy ruined a career as a golden baritone soloist as a result of early addiction to hard liquor.

Sexual activity, in some form, has been in existence since Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden of Eden. When I was a teen, sex was more of a topic of discussion between guys with emerging hormones looking forward to married life and all that took place in the marriage bed.

The sex acts, or even the word itself, was not active in every conversation, or radio and magazine advertising. That is distressingly different from the billboards, TV, and general use of the word today.

When the word drugs was used, it referenced the pharmaceuticals of the day needed for some medical malady. Drug, singularly, meant something had been dragged. Today, conversation revolves around the many life-threatening substances that exist openly in the underworld.

Questions:

(1) What kinds of things did you and your friends do on dates? (2) Did you attend your school dances or proms? With whom? Describe them.

My Answers:

Azars Roller Skating Rink was the choice destination for an active evening date. It was most liked by the more athletic couples, of course. An all-day date might include swimming at the beach, or water skiing. During my teen years, limited pocket money usually allowed for a movie, followed with a hamburger and fries at the **Smack Drive-in** restaurant.

Outdoor activities were more my style, at least a bit more preferable. The events that the FFA sponsored - cookouts or other activities - more or less commanded my presence. If female companionship was available, that was a plus. I don't recall the reason, but I attended my Junior Prom "stag"- that is, I did not have a female companion. I was never much of a dancer, except for the sets called, "hugging-to-music," that were always slow and intimate. I was not a "sock-hop" fancier. I got my tiring work-outs when working, and considered slow dancing a more restful way to enjoy the company of a dancing partner.

Questions:

(1) What were some of the "fads" when you were a teenager? (2) Describe the hair and clothing styles that were popular.

My Answers:

Teen fads were not that important, as I recall. Well, I did own a pair of the popular iridescent socks that came in brilliant orange, lime green, chartreuse, lavender, and strawberry red. They could be seen from half a mile away. The girls liked to wear a different color on each foot. Bathing suits were also made from that same iridescent material. They were popular for a couple of seasons.

Hair styles for boys or girls were not as radical during the 1940's or early 50's. At least they were not like the weird-ness of the 1960's. For the most part, boys wore crew-cuts or shorter variations of left-side parted common cuts with few exceptions. Girls were more into styles that fit their individual personality, but the trend was primarily shoulder-length cuts that accentuated hair type. Poodle Skirts and bobby socks with saddle-shoes and varied blouses or sweaters, were usual dress for the girls. Boys were apt to be wearing Levi's or other plain jeans.

Designer clothing was not yet available on the Sarasota market. Besides, the shortages of wartime had not been replenished. Many of us guys were still happy with home-sewn shirts and the many styles of T shirts that were becoming more common. Penny

loafers were worn, although likely to show some wear and scuffing. Ked's brand canvas shoes, and some common leather oxfords. The effects of wartime still existed.

Questions:

(1) What did you like best and least about your appearance as a teenager? (2) What slang expressions were popular during your teen years?

My Answers:

I have no recollection of being clothes conscious during my teen years. I was "morphing" out of the lean years of the depression, and the shortage years of WW II. I was happy just to be presentable and have a desirable degree of cleanliness. I had physically outgrown my next older brother, so hand-me-downs were seldom showing up in my closet. I was always happy when I could find the 50 cents necessary to keep my crew-cut short enough. By the time I graduated from high-school, I was having to shave at least two or three times per week. I did not like looking grungy on any occasion.

Slang? Once again, I was a bit "square" I guess. What's buzzin' cousin? Goof, cookin' with gas, cut a rug, in cahoots, natch, take a powder, gobbledegook, whistling dixie, and many other second-hand meanings were tossed about in the day-by-day conversations. For some reason I used what was grammatically appropriate when possible.

Questions:

(1) What kind of music was popular? What was your favorite song? Who was your favorite musical performer or band? (2) What kinds of dances were popular during your teen years?

My Answers:

World War II loaded the music world with wartime novelty tunes like, "Right in der Fuhrers Face" and "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree (With Anyone Else but me)." Country-Western music was different back then. It was not all about volume and percussion and singers with a mic in their mouth. It was smooth. Like my favorite, **"Cool Water,"** by the **Sons of the Pioneers** (founded by Roy Rogers).

The big bands were popular with all the current "swing" music. Each with their particular style and professionals on various instruments. Glenn Miller, Benny Goodman, Harry James, Count Basie, Pete Fountain. There was a ton of listenable orchestration available on radio and the many venues where these artists performed. I have never had enough of the programs by **Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians - even later on TV.**

Chapter 5

Questions:

(1) What was your favorite motion picture? Why? (2) Describe your relationship with your parents. Were you able to communicate freely with them?

My Answers:

I liked all the cowboy actors on the silver screen. I was always glad that Gene Autry, Tex Ritter, Hopalong Cassidy, Roy Rogers and all the others could fire their six/guns over and over, seldom having to reload. I was enamored with **"Gone With the Wind**." I think it was the first picture filmed in color, and the story piqued my interest in Civil War history.

I have no doubts, my Mom and Dad liked me. I grew up knowing right where they were at all times. There was not much money, but there was not much to spend it on. And fun was in the natural world, not in worldly things that was considered less than spiritual. When I reached my teen years, I worked for spending money that allowed a minimal bit of dating or extra-curricular activity. I loved my parents and was never disrespectful. I was expected to attend worship services with them, and I was happy to do so. That was simply a basic part of our family life.

There were subjects that were not discussed. Pregnancy, divorce, and sex were three words that weren't used. The act of passing internal gases was not acknowledged, discussed, nor demeaned. That seems contrary to the habits of modern family members. I spoke freely with both parents about most anything of interest. They knew my friends as I often had one or more visiting. When I was of an age to get my driver's license, I did much of the driving to church services or other limited but sometimes necessary destinations.

Questions:

(1) How did you typically get in trouble with your parents? How were you punished? (2) Did you ever get in trouble at school? (3) Did you ever skip school? To do what?

My Answers:

Basically, I did not get in trouble with my parents. Only once do I recall disappointing my Dad, and then it was just that. He was more disappointed than angry. I

had not been licensed to drive for long when he allowed me to use his 1942 Oldsmobile to go to a football game at my high school on a Friday night. He firmly said, "Just be home by eleven o'clock!"

I agreed, but owning no watch, nor paying attention to the passing time, I was late and found him waiting up for me. He was afraid that I must have had an accident or some other dread happenstance. The time was just after midnight. He chided me, of course. And he spoke these words of wisdom which I've never forgotten: "Son, nothing good ever happens when you're out beyond midnight!" It was quite a while before I was brave enough to ask him for the privilege, again. Plus, I felt a tad of shame.

As I've said before, I enjoyed school. I may have been reprimanded a time or two for running in the halls; (probably late to class). Only once was I beyond the perimeter of proper conduct. I regret it as of this day, some fifty-five years later. I skipped most of my history classes, only attending enough to turn in lesson papers.

That was several days for two grading periods; and though I had completed most of the required work, I was given a grade of **"D**" due to my absences, and failure of passing grade on one exam. Mom was required to accompany me for a refreshing talk with the principal. (Carl Strode) I was given probation; thankfully it was close to the end of the school year.

The time away from class, (skipping) served no real purpose except to sit on the curb at School Avenue and chew the fat with four or five other boys that were also skipping a class. I have mentally kicked myself for many years for that little escapade.

Questions:

(1) Were you compatible with your siblings? Did you ever play tricks on them?

(2) When did you get your first car? Did you pay for it or was it a gift? Describe it.

My Answers:

The span from my first-born sibling, Sis. to my youngest brother, Kenny, was a whopping 13 years between them. The age differences, especially when we reached the teen years, changed the day-to-day activities and allegiances. No, not in a bad way. Just different. But we were always family. At various times, we were sincerely concerned about Sis being alone when she was away at Florida State College for Women, Bob serving in the US navy in the south pacific during WWII (1941-1945), and even when Harry was away all summer working on a tobacco farm in Connecticut. I recall little in the way of trickery except for the subteen years when something would disappear mysteriously if you had a disagreement of some sort.

A few weeks prior to my seventeenth birthday, Dad purchased a 1935 Ford sedan for me. Not the sportiest of vehicles but as it turned out, I was one of only four or five of my peers in senior class to drive an owned car to school! It cost $175.00, and to this day I do not know how dad was able to pay for it at the time of purchase. I did pay a portion of it back when I began making a small salary part time at Western Auto. The car was black with

white-sidewall tires, had a radio that worked for a while, was stick shift, and had that eighty-five horse flat head V-8 engine that was popular during those Ford years.

Questions:

(1) To whom did you turn for advice? Why that person? (2) Whom did you admire the most as a teenager? Why?

My Answers:

I was a typical teen of that day and this. I thought I already knew most everything that was important about getting alone. I figured that if I needed to know something, I might find the answer myself in the school library. But Mom or Dad were my primary advisors for anything I failed to sort out for myself. And, who else could I possibly admire more than my parents?

Questions:

(1) Who influenced you most during your teen years? How? (2) Tell the story about something funny or embarrassing that happened to you as a teenager.

My Answers:

I repeat, my parents had the greatest influence on my life! If you have a stable family household, who could possibly influence you more?

I'm certain I must have been embarrassed many times over inconsequential happenings. But all that comes to mind is being on stage at the 1949 FFA convention. In a large choral group of guys, I stood out as the only one with shiny, glowing white duck trousers. It was part of the FFA uniform for the occasion: white shirts, black ties, and the blue colored official FFA jacket. The white pants had been provided and we were told not to launder them until after the performance. For some reason I never knew, mine had gotten smudged and were washed. During a patriotic number we were singing, black-lighting was used to accentuate a large banner that included the American flag. The auditorium lights were turned off and the banner and my shiny white duck pants were the only thing visible.

Questions:

Did you have a nickname? What was it and how did you get it?

My Answers:

Nicknames were not as widely used in my time as they were in my dad's younger years. My Dad and his brothers all had nicknames. They called Dad "**Squire."** My brother Bob dubbed me **"Doc"** for some unknown reason when we were young, and he and my brother Bill called me that forever.

Questions:
What was the most historic event that took place during your "your generation"? How did it affect you?

My Answers:

I've lost count of the presidents who have come and gone during my 93+ years on this earth. I have lived through sixteen or seventeen presidential terms. **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** was in office during part of my first teen year; followed by **Harry S. Truman**. Like as now, they both had true supporters and a like number of "haters". Roosevelt had polio and spent most of his term in a wheelchair. Truman had a daughter that aspired to be a vocalist and he did his best to place her in prominent settings. **UGH!**

I was born just a few years after the automobile became a viable asset to mankind. Modern amenities such as the telephone, electrical appliances and sophisticated tools were still in their infancy. Modern street paving was mostly red bricks, slightly better than cobblestones.

The Social Security act was signed into law in 1935, just three years after my birth. The blimp (dirigible) named **"The Hindenburg"** was design to float on specific gases pumped inside its massive football-shaped hull. But on its maiden voyage with many people on board, it exploded in a ball of fire and plunged to the tarmac. That was in 1937, when I was five. The famous Golden Gate Bridge over the San Francisco Bay was finished that same year. The attack on Pearl Harbor came shortly thereafter, on Dec. 7, 1941. Soon, the U.S. was into World War II on two widely scattered fronts. There was a multitude of political enactments and growth, nationally and world-wide during my generation. I was not affected mentally or emotionally more-so than anyone else. But the changes in politics, industry, and society is still being felt by most folk's, I'm sure.

Questions:

(1) What is the happiest memory you have of your teen years? (2) What is your most painful memory as a teenager?

My Answers:

There was no cataclysmic event that causes a "happiest memory" of my teen years. I was fairly content, always. Still, I guess I would count as my happiest memory the year of 1945 and following. That is when I turned thirteen and spent so much time outdoors hunting, camping with buddies, and being slightly more independent, I counted most days as special. It seems I was considered "dependable" by my parents and it was a good time, as wartime was beginning to cease.

It was painful, losing my **Grandmother Shawl** in October of 1945, and then **Grandpa Shawl** in December of 1950, when I was eighteen.

Questions:

(1) When did you graduate from high school? What was your graduation ceremony like? How did you celebrate? (2) When did you move away from home and where did you go?

My Answers:

I graduated from Sarasota High School the week of **June 5, 1950**. Our class was about 161 students, as I recall. I was number 43 out of that group in scholastic standing - not top ten percent, but not at the bottom either. Graduation ceremonies took place at 8 PM in the Municipal Auditorium on North US 41. **Principal Carl Strode** was present, and **Verman Kimbrough** presented diplomas to the graduates.

I was on the program, with our quartet, singing (Stouthearted Men), **and also with the Glee Club Chorus**; we sang "One World" and "God of our Fathers."

I celebrated by driving Mom and Dad home and having a fresh tomato sandwich. I continued to work full time at Western Auto. And I remained living at home on Longboat Key until my enlistment in the U.S. Navy in March of 1951. Boot Camp was at San Diego, California. And my first duty station was Pensacola Naval Air Station in Pensacola, FL.

Questions:

(1) What was the hardest part of being a teenager? (2) Is there anything else you would like to share about your teen years?

My Answers:

With me, it was something that was merely a part of life that was common to anyone. But the hardest part of being a teenager was likely having to wait for driving privileges and ownership of my first car. Once I had wheels of my own, I was able to maintain my ability to work and do the other things that were necessary to the various facets of passing of time.

It is not braggadocio on my part; it is just the way it was. I was never in trouble with the law. I seem to have chosen my friends or acquaintances in a proper manner. Any disagreement of thought where my family was concerned was resolved peaceably. I must have had a somewhat normal teenage life. Perhaps in the eyes of some it was mundane. But to me, I am happy to have grown up in the time, place, and atmosphere that I was blessed with.

Question:

Where did you go to college and why?

My Answer:

I applied (even sent the required five-dollar application fee) for beginning classes in Freed-Hardeman Christian College (Henderson, TN) soon after my high school graduation. The registrar sent a letter of acceptance, elating my Mom and Dad.

A week later, I received a letter returning my five dollars and rejecting my request for schooling at Freed-Hardeman. I received an education during that week: Not all is what it seems! I still have those letters in my possession and I recall that muted sense of rejection I felt at that time. The admittance fee was a mere 100.00 per year, and scholarships were available. Such is life.

Questions:

(1) Where were you stationed with the military and for how long? What was your specialty? Describe your living conditions. (2) Where did you go and what did you do for rest and relaxation?

My Answers:

My brother Bob had a friend that worked on the local military draft board in Sarasota, Florida. Bob came home after work one evening and said to me, "Doc, you are on the list to get a notice from the draft board next week. You will be called in for a two-year enlistment in the Army." Well, I did not want to be in the Army.

So, the next morning I made my way to the Navy Recruiters office and enlisted in the U.S. Navy. A recruitment poster read, "Join the Navy and see the world!" The resulting train travel took me from Jacksonville, Florida through Atlanta, Georgia, on to Chicago, Illinois, back south through Kansas City, Kansas and Dallas, Texas. From there we rolled across the southwest to Los Angeles, California. The coastal railway delivered me farther south to San Diego, California.

I was sworn in on **March 11, 1951**, back in Jacksonville, FL. I served for four years, but still realize I saw more of the world in the first five days on the train than I did in the remainder of my enlistment. As I recall, boot camp was eleven weeks in duration. It was, well, pretty basic and what you might expect. There were many miles of marching in formation with 99 other recruits.

Then we had sea-fare classes, naval history and protocol classes, survival at sea, firefighting and qualifying on the rifle range. Each area of indoctrination required testing to pass and receive rating stripes. March, April, and May in California was both cold at night and hot by day. There was a cold, thick fog that rolled in from the Pacific almost nightly. The food was adequate. My induction weight was 144, and somehow – despite all the marching and mediocre food -- I actually gained a few pounds.

My first billet, following boot camp, was Pensacola Naval Air Station in the Florida panhandle. Some of the guys were sent to sea duty on various ships and immediately into the **Korean War** zone. Wow! I was sent back to Florida, my home state!

In the 1950's, however, it was still a fourteen-hour drive from Pensacola to Sarasota. No interstate highways back then. The barracks were of red-brick construction with austere sleeping compartments, but modern. And it was kept clean and orderly by command of our superiors.

This installation was the home of the **Naval Air Cadet Program**. Future Navy Pilots were trained for all aspects of Naval warfare in the air. They got their first taste of carrier landings here, a requirement for receiving their "wings" and appointment as a Navy officer.

I was assigned duty as **a driver** in the transportation department. Our vehicles were a fleet of 1950 and 1951 Chevrolet sedans and carryalls. I served as dispatcher for a short period. Then I got the prestigious job of full-time driver for the **Admiral** in charge of the **NAVCAD** program. The Admiral's official auto was a new 1951 Pontiac sedan, with a stick shift transmission, of course. He was a stickler for timing. If he said he wanted to arrive at the Whiting Field administration building entrance at 08:00, he did not mean 07:58 or 08:03. I learned a lot about varying my speed and travel route to accomplish that requirement.

I was stationed at Pensacola for two years, then **re-billeted** to **Oceana Naval Air Station near Norfolk, Virginia**. I was attached to **Fighter Squadron VF 84.** I was assigned the duty of **aircraft mechanic** for a few weeks, then given the responsibility of "**plane captain.**" That was not a rank, just a designation that identified me as the one to determine the general flight-worthiness of the aircraft.

I was charged with assisting the pilot's ingress and 'strapping-in," connecting the engine-start power unit, followed by an additional inspection for fuel or hydraulic leaks. Then, when all was determined "good-to-go," I signaled a " thumbs up." Then I guided the pilot away from his designated pre-flight location.

Our planes were the **F9F 5 Panther jet**. I was one and a half years at Oceana, during which our squadron was deployed to **Cuban waters aboard the USS Lake Champlain**, Essex class carrier for two separate cruises of only two months each. That was very limited time that I ever actually served aboard a ship or in a military type operation.

My third and final duty station was a duration of six months at **Sanford, Florida**. That was a relatively short 3-hours' drive from Sarasota. **The Naval Auxiliary Air Station** there was quiet, compared to the other places I had served during my enlistment. In fact, I was not attached to a squadron there; I was given the responsibility of maintaining the operation of the athletic gear locker for the benefit of personnel and their families. And, that was "port and starboard duty," meaning 24-hours on base and 24-hours off. So, I worked an every-other-day job with the Western Auto Store in Sanford until my enlistment ended.

Questions:

(1) Were any of your children born while you were in the military? What was military family life like? (2) Describe your feelings and experiences about being apart from loved ones.

My Answers:

I had married in June of 1951. Our first child, **Davy Lee Betts**, was born on **June 15, 1952** in Pensacola when I was stationed there. Our second son, **Michael Alan Betts**, was born in the Portsmouth Naval Hospital in Portsmouth, Virginia on **March 17, 1954**. Military life for families can be daunting; I don't recommend it. And, using the words of Forrest Gump, that is all I have to say about that.

Questions:

(1) Were you ever in combat? Tell about some experiences. (2) Were you involved in or did you see anyone engage in tremendous acts of courage?

My Answers:

I was not involved in military combat, although my enlistment spanned a considerable bit of the Korean War duration. However, both the deployments on the **USS Lake Champlain Carrier** were for the purpose of international war games that employed tactics for naval atomic-sea-warfare. The operations of many different types of ships, submarines, and aircraft with live rocketry, and heavy naval gunfire provided all I wished to know of actual battle.

I did find beauty in those surroundings; our Creator colored the ocean with a deep blue hue that contrasted nicely with the purity of white caps on the waves, as far as the naked eye could see.

Courage, I suppose, factors into different aspects of a job well done. Or, is manifested when one goes beyond their usual call of duty. I saw rescues from hazardous circumstances. I saw one horrible accident too gruesome to put in print.

I experienced a humdinger of what I shrugged off as just another near miss. We were involved in flight operations, with some returning planes already being tied down on the forward end of the deck. The carrier was traveling at full landing operational speed of approximately 36 knots. My pilot had landed safely and the plane towed into position for tie-down. I had waited on the catwalk on the port side with approximately sixty pounds of tie-down reels and cables across my shoulders in preparation for securing the craft when it was in place. I stepped up to the deck level and walked toward my planes position, bowing a bit into the strong force of the wind across the ships deck.

Several steps separated me from my plane when I heard the "whump" of another plane touching down toward the rear of the flight-deck, and a chorus of loud vocal expressions coming from others on the deck. I quickly took notice of the nose wheel from the just landed plane that was spinning and bouncing down the deck towards me; which way would it go? I lunged for the nose wheel of my parked plane, dropping my cables and reels as I dove for the deck. I landed in a painful nose down prone position on the hard deck, just as the loose wheel struck the wheel I was partly behind. That fast-moving, loose

wheel careened off in a high arc. It went sailing over the starboard side of the ship to find its way to Davy Jones Locker far below the surface of the sea. That cannon-ball of a wheel was undoubtedly moving at least 60 to 80 MPH when it reached my position. If it had struck me standing up, . . . Well, let's just say that I'm glad it didn't!

Questions:

(1) Did you win any medals or decorations? For what? (2) What was it like for you when the war ended? (3) Altogether, how long did you serve? What was your highest rank?

My Answers:

I received the good conduct medal with ribbon. Everybody gets one, if they behave themselves. I also received my theater of service ribbons.

The Korean War armistice was signed on **July 27, 1953**, more than a year before my enlistment ended. I was content with my remaining time of service in relative peace. That is, until the USA involvement in the **Viet Nam** skirmish began sometime in 1954. I despised the lack of patriotic support for the lives lost in that bit of seemingly unending bloodshed both in Korean and in Viet Nam.

As I related earlier, I wore my uniform for four years, lacking one day. Rates, (rank) were basically frozen during my years of service. It was said that the nearing end of wartime was the reason. I passed the rating exams several times (always with scores in the top ten percent) when they were provided, but each time was denied advancement.

I began as **Airman Apprentice** and was soon promoted to **Airman**. I would not receive my next, and final, rate until three months prior to my discharge from service. I was awarded the rating of **Aviation Machinist Mate, 3rd class**.

Was that a ploy to get me to ship over for another four years? I was pressed by **First Lieutenant Northridge** to make a career of the Navy. I smiled at him. Then I saluted him for my last time. Then, I made my way home to Sarasota and to the great unknown.

Questions:

(1) What did you do right after your military service? (2) What was the hardest adjustment you had to make returning to civilian life?

My Answers:

Sarasota, my little home town, had entered into a noticeable lull. It may have been the uncertainty of wartime. I'm not sure. But no one was hiring. There was no consideration given to returning servicemen. I was no exception. I searched for any work that would provide even the basest of remuneration. Almost two months passed before I was hired as

a **sales clerk** at **Adams & Houser Hardware** store on State Street in downtown Sarasota. My previous employer had sold his franchise for the Western Auto Store on Pineapple Avenue, and retired. That of course, had been my somewhat expected workplace as he always called me his star salesman.

Adjusting to the cost of living in the civilian world, again, gave me cause to rethink my decision to leave the Navy life. But my desire was to stay true to my commitment to family, and be closer to friends and extended family. I soon found it necessary to accept a different form of employment that allowed me to increase my weekly income; although it would require my working many more hours per week.

Chapter 6

Don's Other Books

Don Betts holds the unusual distinction of having written not very much at all during the first 80 years of his life. Oh, sure, there were love notes to his family members and maybe a poem for a friend or two. That was about it. Then, at the age of 82, he discovered he had a gift for storytelling and poetry. The book you have in your hands is the 6th book he has to his credit.

Book 1

Partners in Rhyme:
Repeat Offenders of Literary Rules

What happens when two old guys put their heads together? Well, the true answer is this: almost anything wild and outside the box. In this case, the result was that Stan Paregien and Don Betts birthed a collaborative literary effort.

Okay, maybe "literary" is a bit of a stretch for these senior gents and what they did. But Partners in Rhyme pretty much tells the story and the cover nails it down. This is a book of rhyming poetry like you ain't never read before. Part 1 is filled with "Patriotic Poems." Part 2, "Inspirational & Religious Poems." Part 3, "Poems of the Genus Cowboicus Poeticus," which being interpreted means "Cowboy Poetry." Part 4, "Americana, Floridianna & Such." Part 5, "Fun Poems with Few Redeeming Virtues." Part 6, "Odds and Ends and Such," has Stan's bio, Don's bio, and info on Stan books.

Book 2

Remembering the Way It Was:
An Olio of Tales Untold.

This book is the biography of a remarkable man named Don Betts. He is a walking, talking encyclopedia of Florida culture. He has delighted his friends with descriptions of life in Florida during his first 40 years of life. That was back when the area of present-day Sarasota County and Manatee County had a lot of land that was still pristine Floridian. Lots of swamps, freely running creeks and a lightly developed Gulf Coast. Residents could harvest from the Gulf of Mexico such seafood delights as scallops, mullet, and shrimp. Or they could fish the inland waters for a countless variety of freshwater fish, or maybe hunt for frogs, coyotes, bobcats, quail, black bear and an occasional panther.

Don Betts tells how he was born at just the right time and in just the right place to be able to enjoy the good life as Tarzan of his own jungle and Lord of his nearly deserted far south end of Longboat Key. His father, George Betts, was personally chosen by circus king John Ringling to be his Chief Horticulturist. George tended and expanded the Ringling nursery on the Sarasota Bay side of far south Longboat Key. Then he transplanted both native and exotic species for projects ranging from Mabel Ringling's famous Rose Garden to the grounds of their mansion and to the Ringling Museum of Art.

Don tells us how he tagged along with his dad, sometimes even helping him. And how, in the process, he met many of the Circus performers and most of the other employees. Now countless others will have the opportunity to read his wise, and witty lines and those, well, sometimes puzzling big words.

He became a poet after age 80, but some of his poems are masterpieces. He and Stan Paregien Sr. previously co-authored a book (and eBook) titled, **Partners in Rhyme** (2020).

Please understand that this book is not sequential or chronological. It is a rare look at Florida life caught in snapshots. Starting after he turned 80, he entered different – and often unconnected – memories about his unusual life. He was helped along the way by his wife, Judy Duke Betts. They live in Lakewood Ranch, Florida. (Published March 31, 2020)

Book 3

Three Day Trip:
A Novel of Old Florida

The author of this novel, Don Betts, knows a lot about old Florida. No, he was not one of the first settlers. But he knew Manatee County and Sarasota County when they were still sparsely populated. He was born in 1932 on the far southeast end of Long Boat Key, Florida.

There he grew up in a Tarzan-like environment. There were few vehicles on the dirt road that ran from north to south on the island. Plenty of trees and animals and birds, not to mention snakes and mosquitos. Ample time to explore the swamps and to swim in the Gulf waters with the Manatee and dolphin nearby. Always an abundance of food to be had from the Gulf by fishing with poles, netting or just grabbing with one's hands.

Don's father, George Betts, worked for decades for the legendary circus King, Mr. John Ringling. No, his father did not tame the lions or ride the hippos. He father was a plant and flower man, the chief horticulturalist for Mr. Ringling. Therein hang many tales.

Don Betts listened to the other stories that his parents and grandparents talked about life in old Manatee County, before the creation of Sarasota County. Out of those true stories, plus his extensive reading of the area's captivating history, he brings to life a fictional adventure of an old-time Florida family making a trip to town for supplies and returning home over a three-day period. It is a novel of old Florida, but it is deeply rooted in history.

It is less than 20 miles from Old Miakka to Sarasota, Florida as the crow flies. What today is maybe a 30-minute drive each way on blacktop roads, back then was a three-day round-trip in a wagon pulled by a team of oxen.

This Florida couple, Joe and Aggie, had four active boys ranging from age 1.5 years to their 8-year-old firstborn, George. They traveled by oxen-power, with their team usually tasked to pull a loaded wagon.

This family adventure features a mixed cast of water moccasins, gopher tortoises, mosquitos, razorback hogs, Great Blue Heron, American Egret, chicken snakes and rattlesnakes. (Published July 7, 2020.) **Three Day Trip** is a prequel to **Edge of Existence**.

Book 4

Edge of Existence:
Life on Dirt Roads

This one is a sequel to **Three Day Trip**. It is a work of fiction. The tale, as told, is a compilation of many stories which Don's late father, George Betts, shared with him before his passing many years ago. Some of the events really happened, though not related entirely accurate as to time or place. The events are factual in substance. Most of the personal names of the characters are from those Don's father often mentioned in his own stories.

This book is set in old-time Florida where dedicated and paved roadways were basically non-existent. Small towns or villages like Arcadia, Pine Level, Sarasota, Old Manatee, and Braidentown had sandy or muddy roads, depending upon weather conditions.

The quest for land ownership and for a self-sufficient way of life was sought and enjoyed by more and more families as the years progressed. This book focuses on a poor family trying to make a living on the wild Florida frontier. The father and mother, Joe and Aggie, work hard to provide their four young boys with food on the table and a roof over their heads. It may very well remind you of such classic Floridian novels as **The Yearling** (1939) by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings and **A Land Remembered** (1984) by Patrick D. Smith.

Book 5

Legacy of Land, Lumber and Love:
Family Life in Old-Time Florida

This book continues the story of early pioneering as told in Don's 3rd and 4th books named above. This novel continues the story of Joe, a simple and honest farmer, lumberman, and an ambitious entrepreneur. This book depicts the daily life of Joe and his large family, and vividly tells of their struggles over a 30-year period.

Book 6

Happy Memories:
Stairsteps to Heaven

Don Betts, the creative guy that he is, wrote this very revealing side of his spiritual values and lifestyle. It is an honest, sometimes painful, look at his life from his youth to the grand age of 93+. As with most of us, he and his family and friends had their ups and downs and sometimes a sideways moment or two. Yet, through the trials and tribulations and successes and victories, Don and Judy remain unmovably in love with each other and with their extended families, with their friends and neighbors and fellow Christians, and with their God.

What adds to the value of this book is that Don took it upon himself to write and format the manuscript. Then he took it to a skilled professional printing company and they produced the folds of printed pages that make up his book. Then, amazingly, Don designed the cover, printed it off, and put the whole thing together with loving care. It is a certified understatement to call this a "Limited Edition." He only printed enough to give to a few select friends and relatives that he believed would actually read it.

Book 7

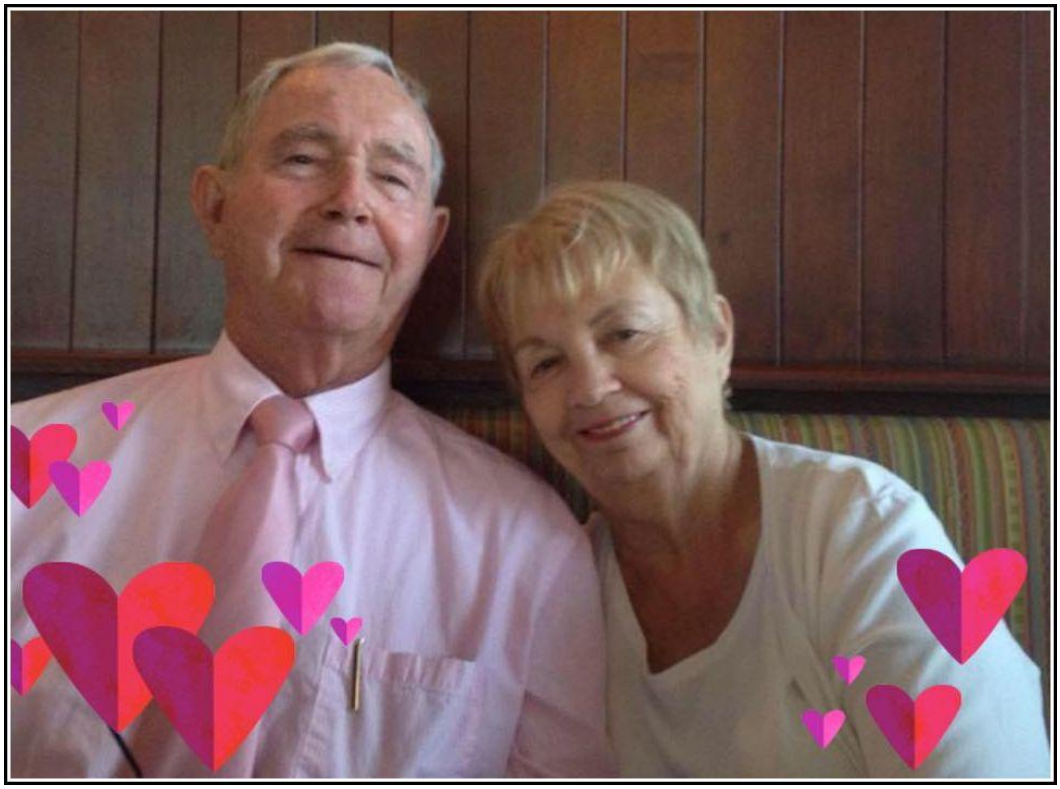
More of My Life

This is the book you are reading right now. It was his story to tell and he wanted to do it his way. But he stuck to the "Questions & Answers" format. It's just that it is **selected** questions and answers. That is the nature of what you have read or are about to read.

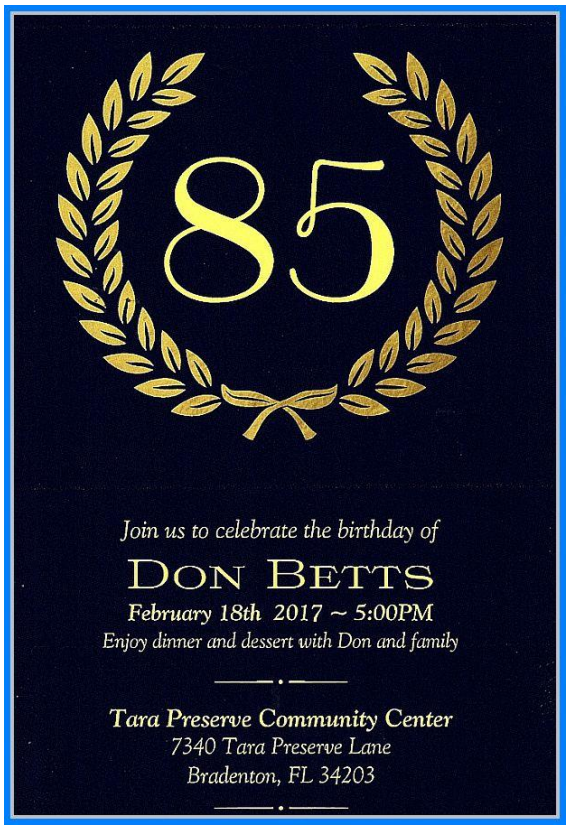
Don loaded it with lots of details about the Betts family history (and related clans). And he tells many delightful stories about his adventures and misadventures way back when, as only he can tell them. Don is an honest chronicler, of course, so he talks about his mountain top experiences and his low moments as well. Once you catch on to the unusual format, the storyline will ebb and flow like the Gulf waves that Don has loved all of his 93+ years.

Chapter 7

Photo Gallery



Don & Judy Betts on Valentines' Day circa 2018

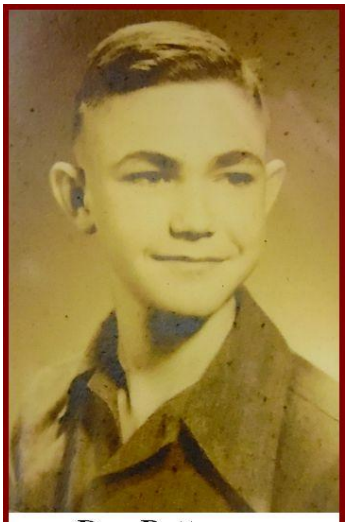

85
Join us to celebrate the birthday of
DON BETTS
February 18th 2017 ~ 5:00PM
Enjoy dinner and dessert with Don and family
Tara Preserve Community Center
7340 Tara Preserve Lane
Bradenton, FL 34203

Don & Judy Betts on the occasion of his 85th birthday party (born Feb. 9, 1932) in Bradenton, FL. By Peggy Paregien

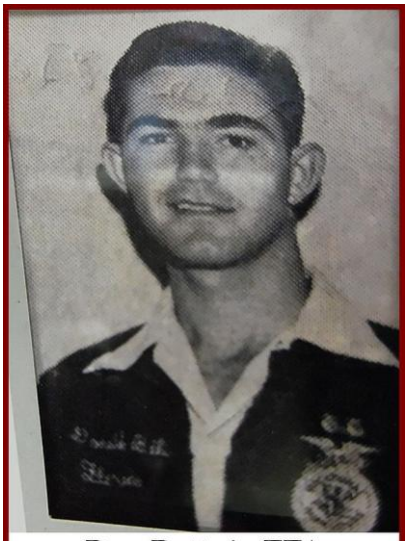
Dr. Pat Hardeman - Don Betts' birthday - Feb. 18, 2017 - Bradenton, FL - by Stan Paregien

Sybil, wife of Dr. Pat Hardeman, at Don Betts' birthday party - Feb. 18, 2017 - Bradenton, FL - by Stan Paregien

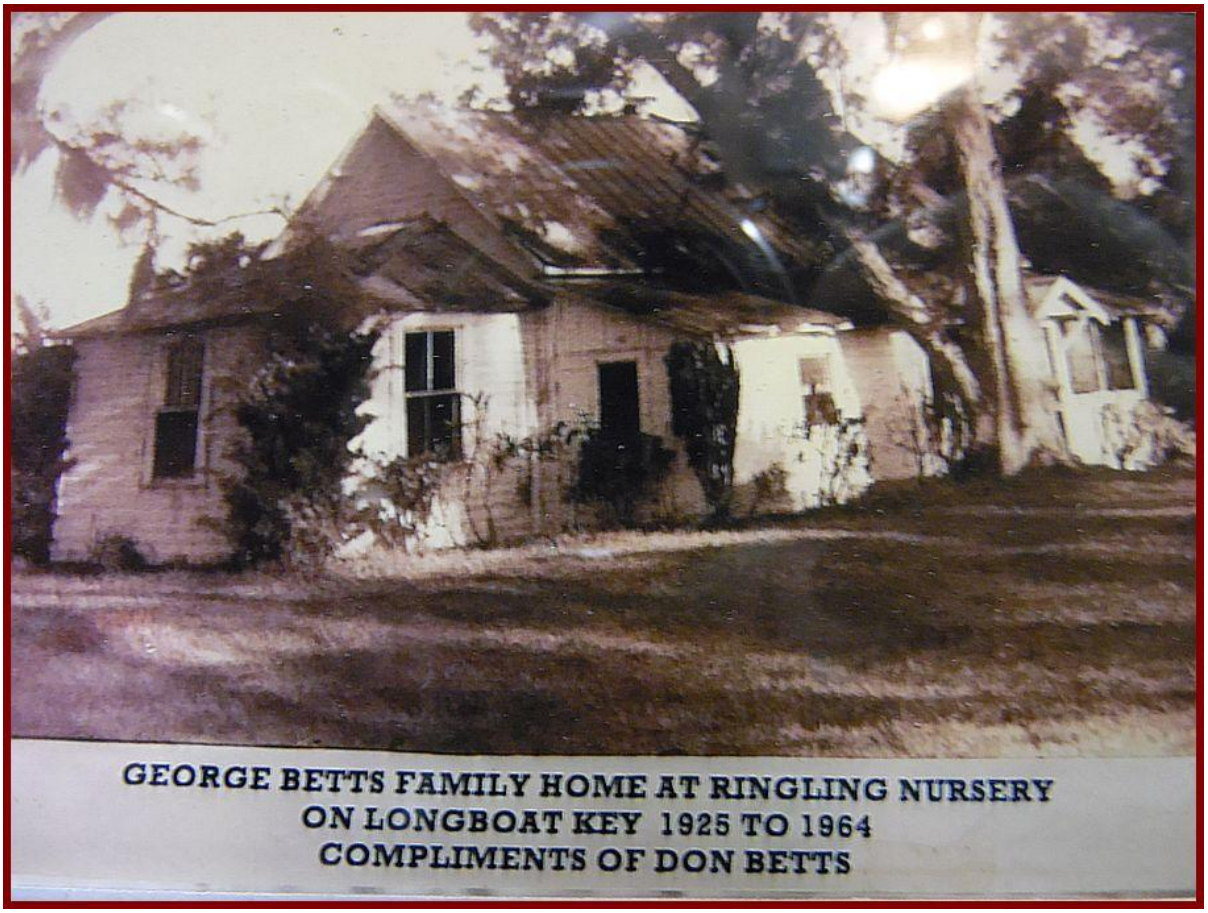
Thomas Betts
1615 - 1688



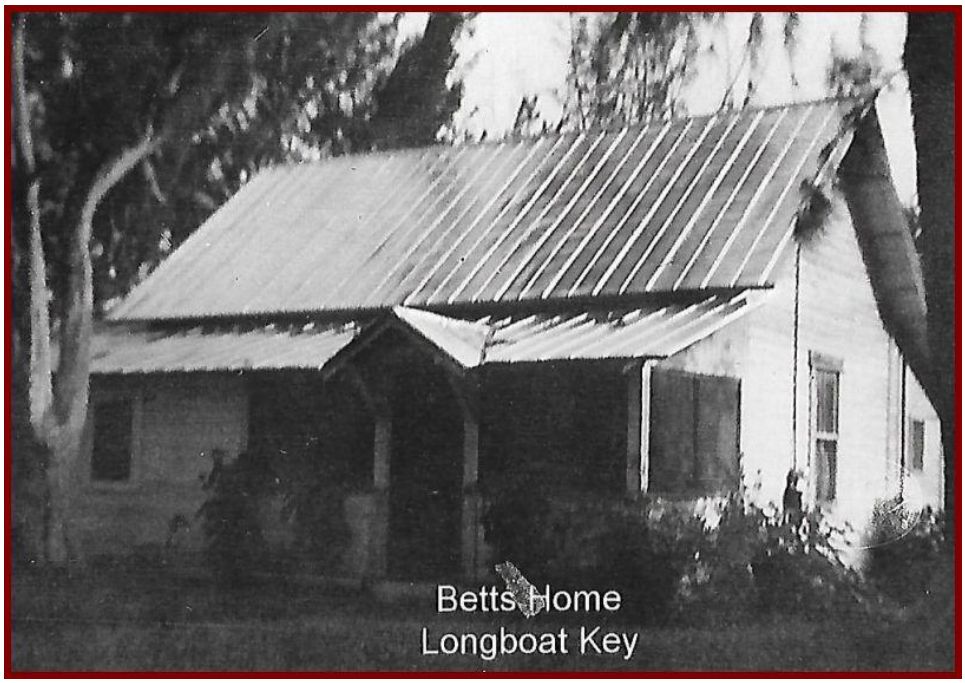
Don Betts as a teenager.



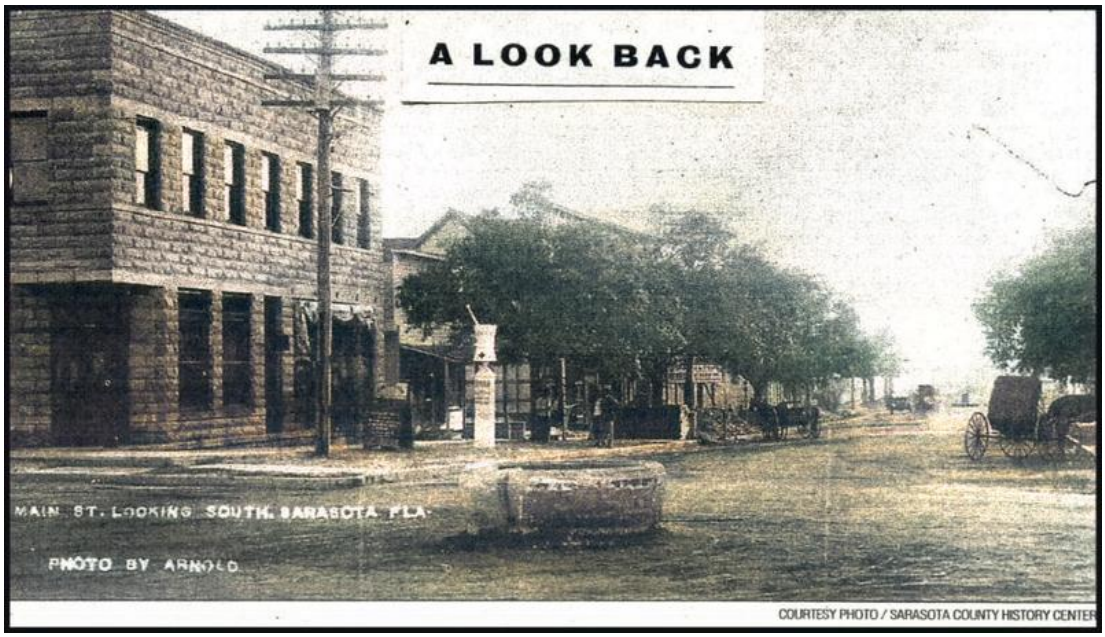
Don Betts in FFA



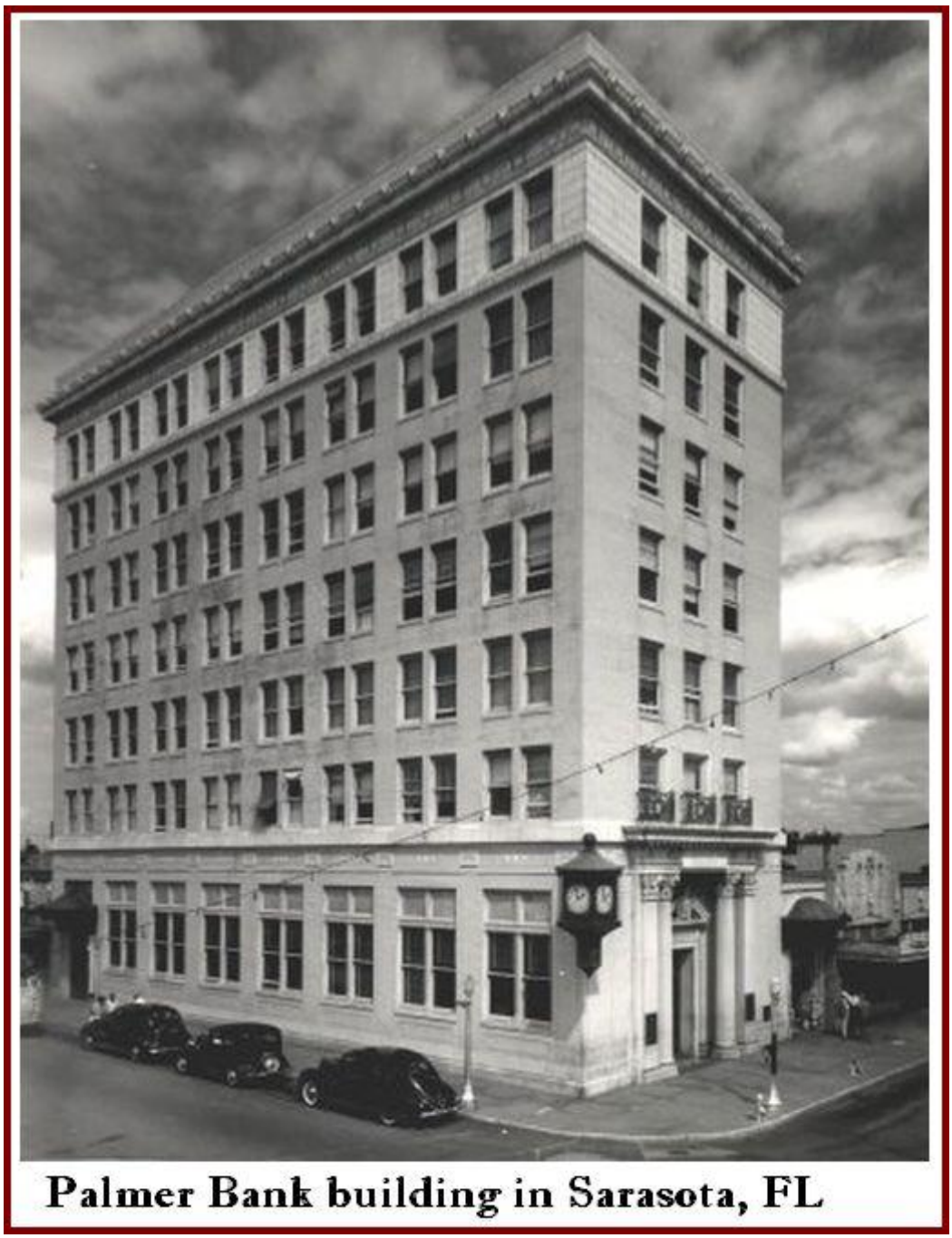
GEORGE BETTS FAMILY HOME AT RINGLING NURSERY
ON LONGBOAT KEY 1925 TO 1964
COMPLIMENTS OF DON BETTS



Another view of the home that John Ringling provided for the George Betts family on the southeast end of Longboat Key.



Water trough in the middle of the "Five Points" (i.e., 5 streets intersecting) intersection in old-time Sarasota, FL. Note the dirt (often muddy) streets, as they did not start paving streets with bricks until about 1910. That's what Don told me, but he wants you to know that he was not there to witness it, as he was not born until 1932. The Badger Building is on the left, and straight west was the wooden pier on Sarasota Bay.



Palmer Bank building in Sarasota, FL

This is a photo of the Palmer Bank building (1923-1963)in Sarasota in about 1938 or so. Much later, Don Betts worked there. He rose to the rank of Vice President before moving on.

Moder Aerial View of Longboat Key, Florida, looking south to north.

The El Vernona Hotel before it became the John Ringling Hotel following a dispute between John Ringling and his business partner Owen Burns (circa 1925).

A postcard view of the John Ringling Hotel (circa 1953).

PLAYGOLFSARASOTA

ONE SOURCE. TRUSTED PGA PROFESSIONAL

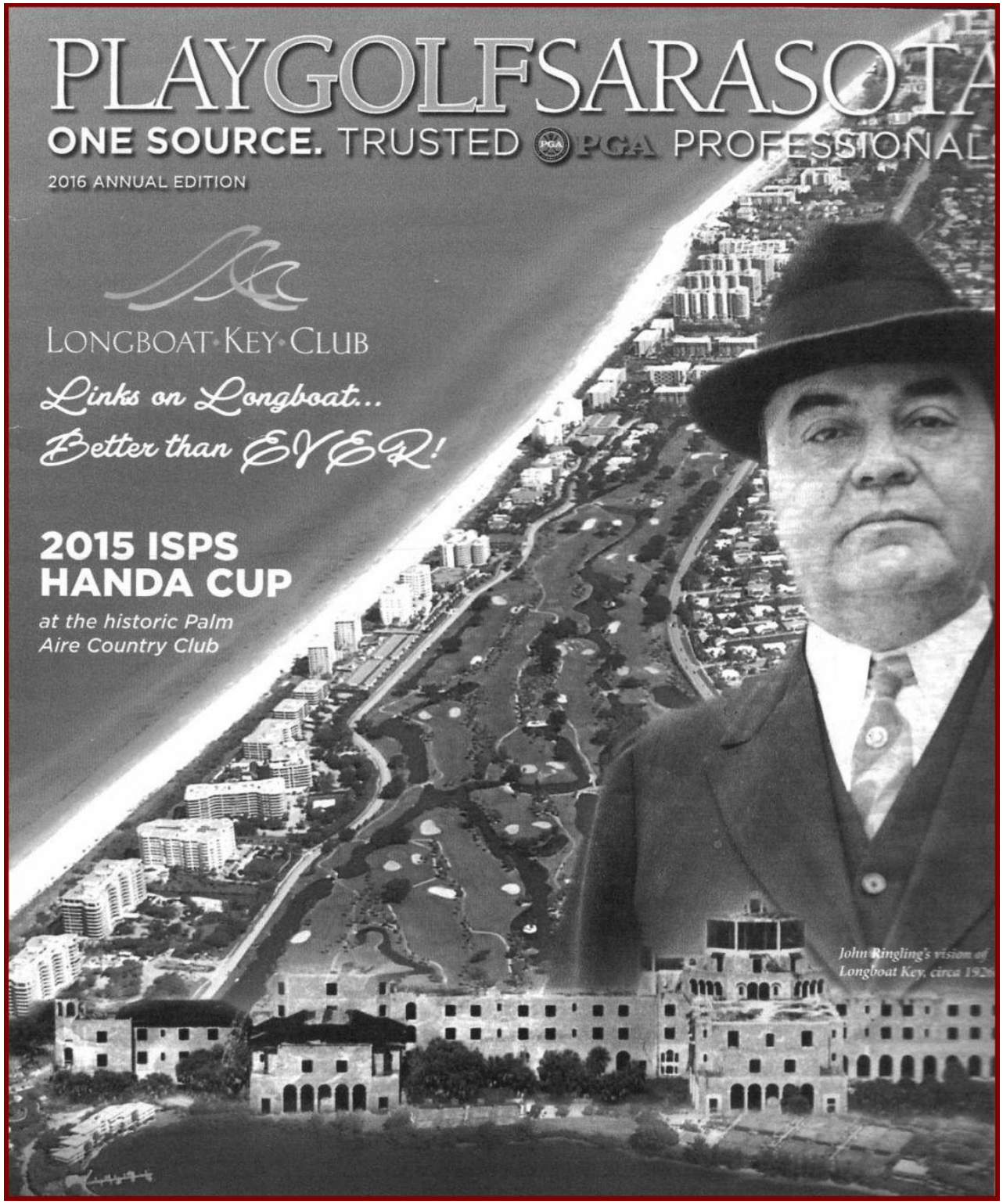
2016 ANNUAL EDITION

LONGBOAT KEY CLUB

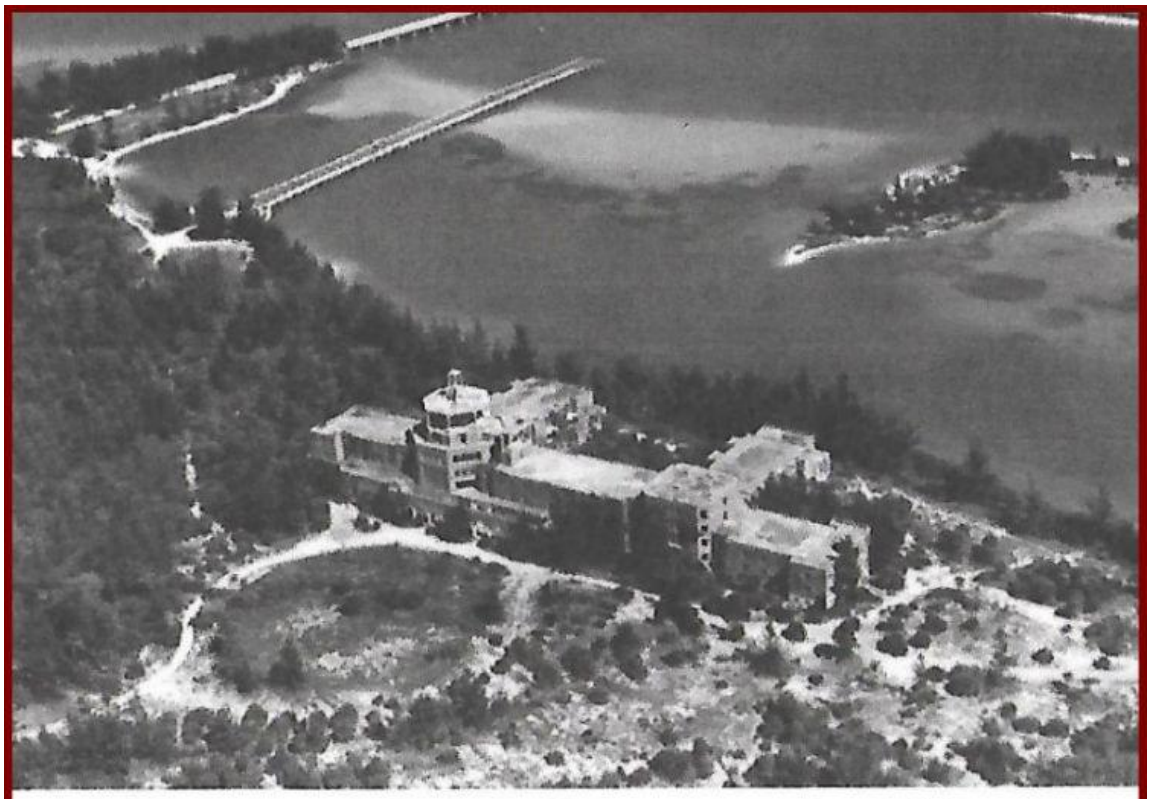
Links on Longboat...
Better than EVER!

2015 ISPS HANDA CUP

at the historic Palm Aire Country Club



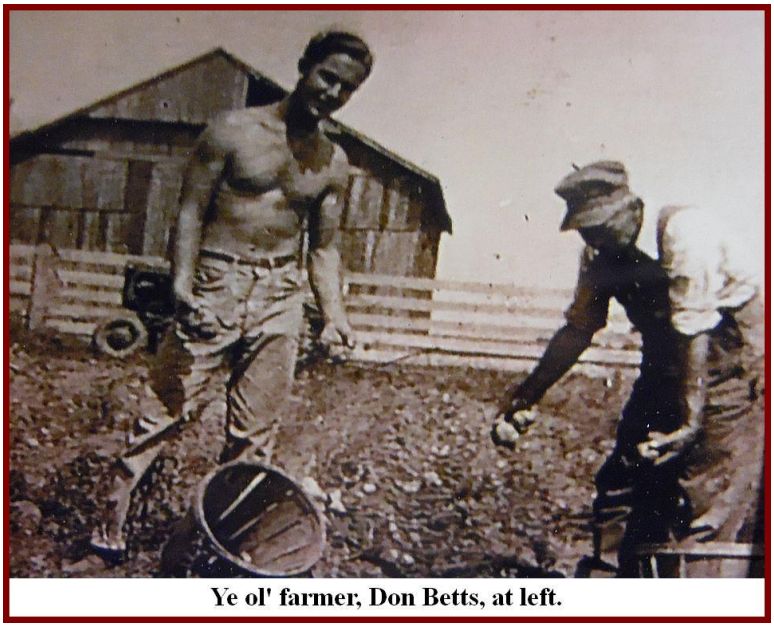
John Ringling's vision of Longboat Key, circa 192



An aerial view of the unfinished Ritz-Carlton Hotel at the southern end of Longboat Key (1952).

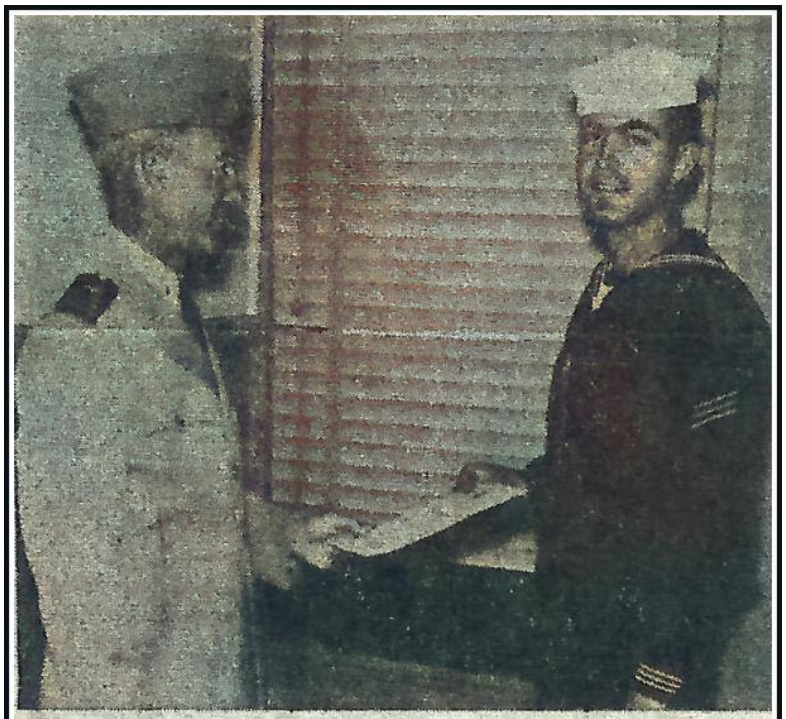
A view of the gardens and courtyard of the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota (1961).

Here is a group of U.S. Army soldiers during World War 1. Don's father, George Betts, is on the right, sitting on the ground.

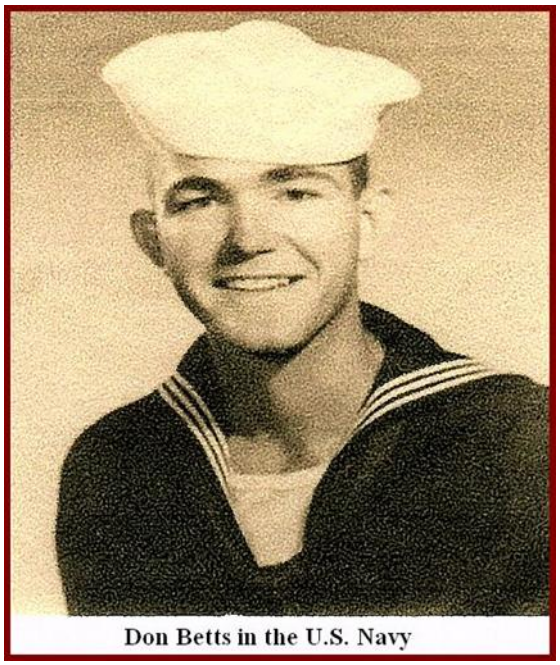


Ye ol' farmer, Don Betts, at left.

Circa 1949 in rural Ohio for the summer.



ADVANCES IN RATE—Donald Betts, aviation machinist's mate third class, USN, son of Mr. and Mrs. George E. Betts of Route 5, Box 1218, is advanced to his present rate, effective Jan. 1, at the U.S. Naval Auxiliary Air Station Sanford. His commanding officer, Navy Cdr. T. O. Murray, presents him with a certificate of advancement. He is attached to Fleet Aircraft Service Squadron 51.

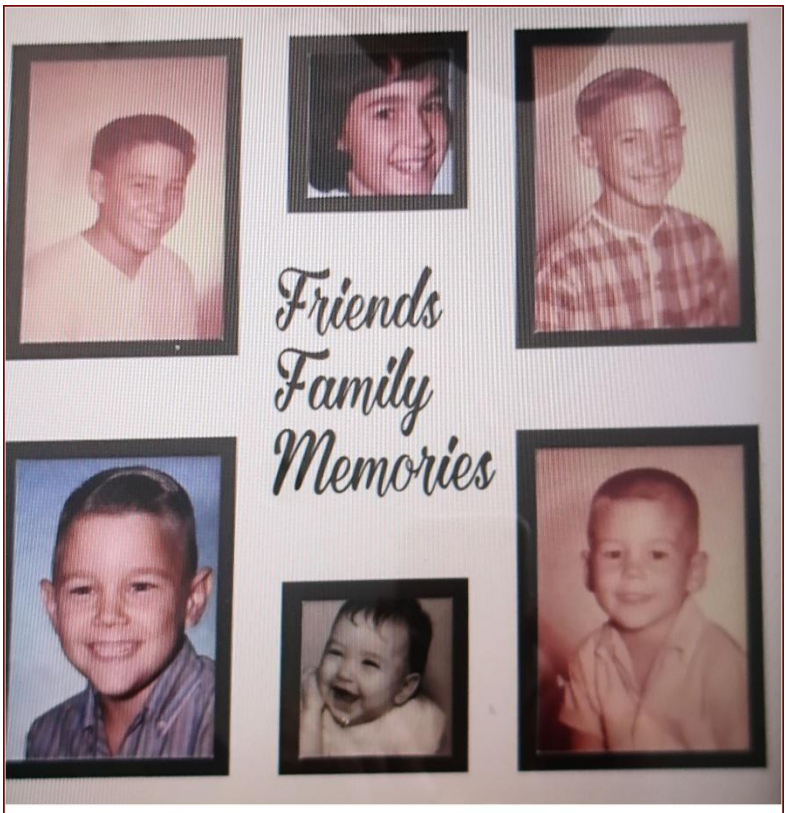


Don Betts in the U.S. Navy

Don in his wild days . . .
or not.

Don & Judy Betts ~ July 21, 2001 ~~ Keuka, FL

Christmas time at the home of Don and Judy Betts, their children and his father, George Betts.



BETTS CHILDREN - TOP, L to R: Dave, Sue, & Big Mike. Bottom, L to R: Tom, Kristi, Little Mike (2,701 x 3,125 pixels - 1,200 dpi)

BETTS CHILDREN - Back, L to R):Dave Betts & Michael "Big Mike" Betts. Front, L to R: Michael "Little Mike" Betts, Sue Betts, Kristi Betts & Tom Betts (2000 pixels 350 dpi)

Don & Judy / below, in Hawaii

Book-Betts 01 Judy & Don Betts 5885 x 8206 H pixels 1200 dpi

Welcome aboard
ISLAND PRINCESS
VANCOUVER, KETCHIKAN, JUNEAU, SKAGWAY, GLACIER BAY, SEWA
September - 13th September 2003

Don & Judy Betts

In Hawaii

Clay and Pat (Little) Landes (and family) at their 50th wedding anniversary party -- Central Church of Christ in Sarasota, FL on Sat., Sept. 5, 2015 - by Stan Parcejen

Clay & Pat Landes – 50th Wedding Anniversary, Sept. 5, 2015

ABE GUILLERMO & FRIEND JEAN PENDERGRASS

2015 - BY JIM PARKER (????)

Mrs. Don (Judy) Betts at a "Marauders" semi-pro baseball game in Bradenton, Florida on July 3, 2015 -- by Peggy Paregien

Don and Judy Betts at the Central Church of Christ in Sarasota, FL on Fathers Day -- Sunday, June 19, 2016 - Photo by Peggy Paregien.

Jim Sheila Waid and family

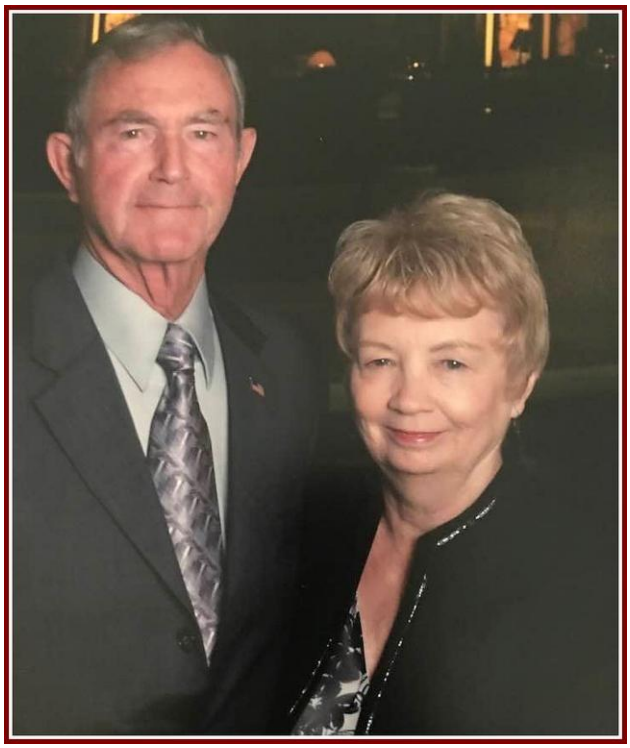
Sue Adams at Don Betts' 85th birthday party - Feb. 18, 2017 - Bradenton, FL - by Stan Paregien

Bev & Dave Lane - Feb. 18, 2017 - Bradenton, FL - by Stan Paregien

Flashbacks

Book-Betts 02--A Judy & Don Betts - date unknown 5404 x 5053 pix 1,200 dpi

Don & Judy Betts - July 21, 2001 -- Kyakka, FL



GENERAL
MANAGER
Rebecca Holmes

Partners in Rhyme

Repeat Offenders of Literary Rules

Stan Paregien & Don Betts

Stan's 23rd Book

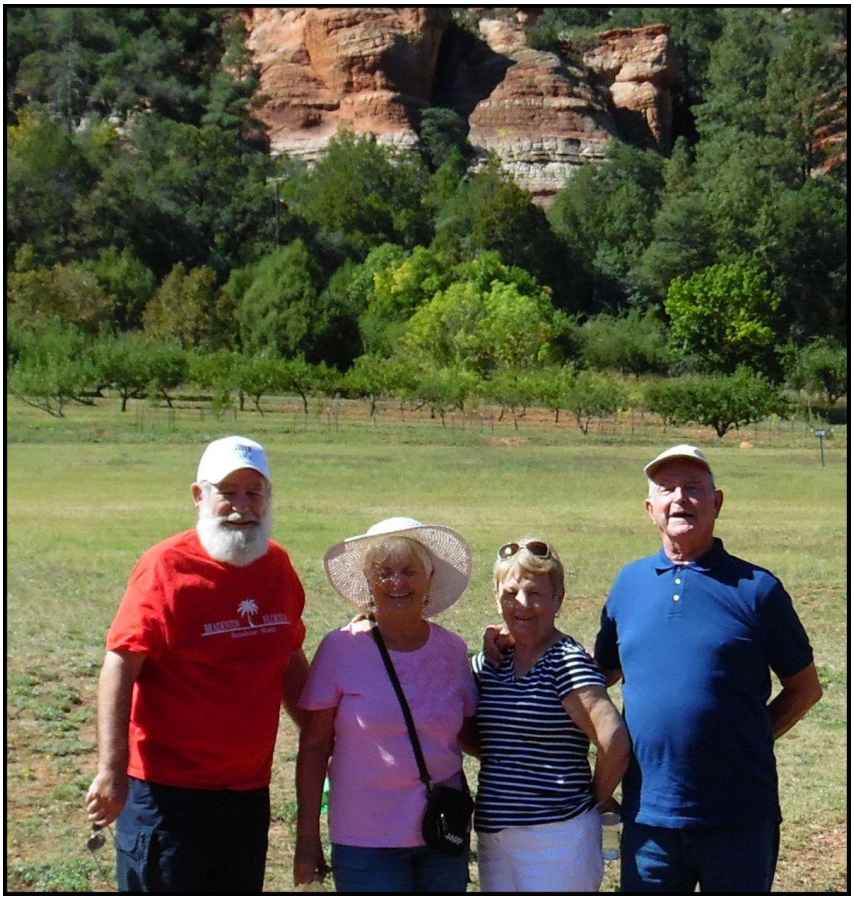
Grammarians, Beware

Sedona, Arizona in 2015

Stan & Peggy Paregien were guests of Don & Judy Betts at The Ridge, their condo.

Don and Judy Betts seem to think that sign was about them. The Chapel of the Holy Cross - Sedona, Arizona -- Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2015 - copyrighted by Stan Paregien

Stan Paregien & Don Betts, members OGAR (Old Goats at Rest) - Oct. 13, 2015 at Sedona, AZ - copyrighted by Peggy Paregien



Stan & Peggy Paregien with Don & Judy Betts
At Slide Rock State Park north of Sedona, AZ.
Oct. 14, 2015.

Don Betts likes anything created, as he was, in 1932. Slide Rock State Park - located on Highway 89A in Oak Creek Canyon, north of Sedona, AZ. Wednesday, Oct. 14, 2015 - Copyrighted by Stan Paregien
APPLE PACKING SHED
BUILT IN 1932

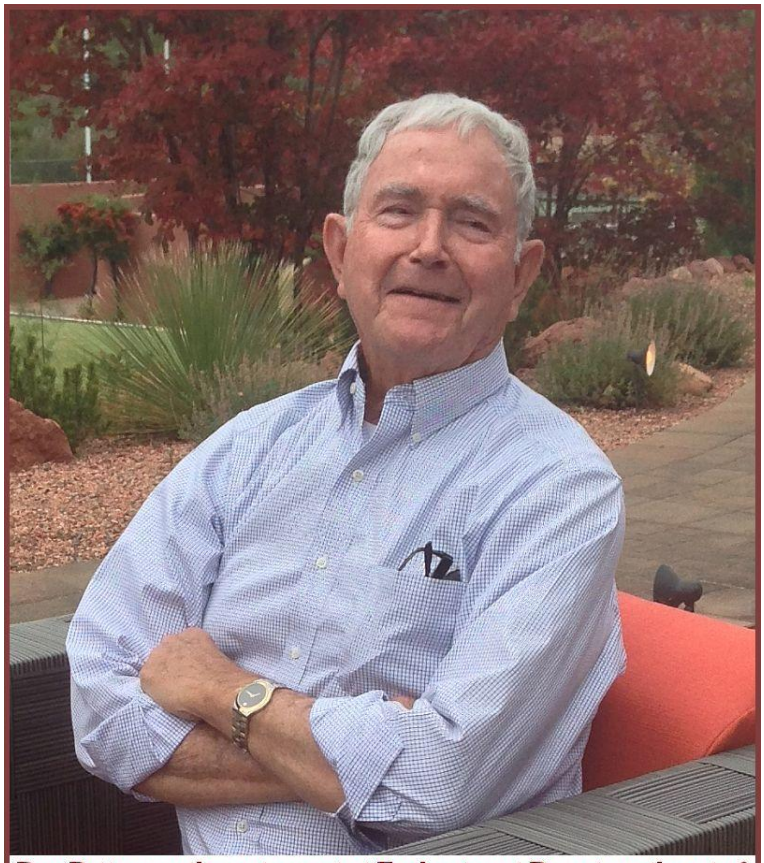
Don & Judy Betts at Blazin' M Ranch in Cottonwood, AZ - 2015--10--16 - Copyrighted by Peggy Paregien

Sedona, AZ - 2017

Don & Judy Betts at the Oaxaca Restaurant in downtown Sedona - Sedona, AZ - Nov. 12, 2017 - by Stan Paregien

Peggy & Stan Paregien with Don & Judy Betts at the Oaxaca Restaurant - Sedona, AZ - Nov. 12, 2017

Peggy & Stan Paregien and Don & Judy Betts - Enchantment Resort - Sedona, AZ - Nov. 14, 2017



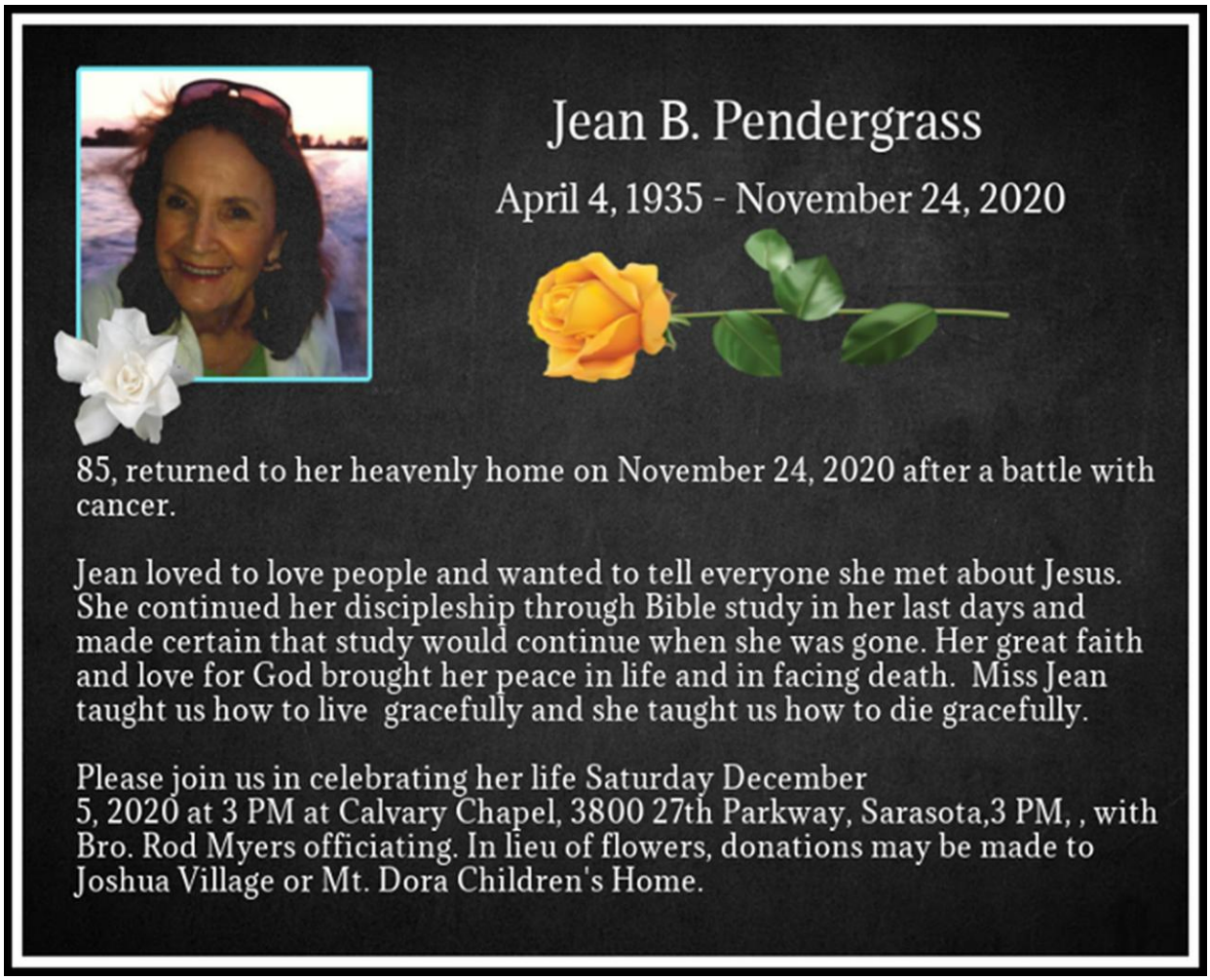
Don Betts near the restaurant at Enchantment Resort northwest of Sedona, AZ - Nov. 14, 2017 - by Peggy Paregien

Stan Paregien & Don Betts - Bradenton, FL - 2018--06--21 - by Rom Coella

Pat Landes regaled us with her storytelling at a "Talent Night" at the Central Church of Christ in Sarasota, FL on Saturday, April 13, 2019 - by Stan Paregien

A sad goodbye as beloved members Shirley (center) and Mike (couldn't make it) Cook move off to Arkansas after so many years here. Central Church of Christ in Sarasota, FL on Saturday, April 13, 2019 - by Stan Paregien

Peggy Paregien & Jean Pendergrass
Sept. 20, 2020 -Venice, FL


Jean B. Pendergrass
April 4, 1935 - November 24, 2020
85, returned to her heavenly home on November 24, 2020 after a battle with cancer.
Jean loved to love people and wanted to tell everyone she met about Jesus. She continued her discipleship through Bible study in her last days and made certain that study would continue when she was gone. Her great faith and love for God brought her peace in life and in facing death. Miss Jean taught us how to live gracefully and she taught us how to die gracefully.
Please join us in celebrating her life Saturday December 5, 2020 at 3 PM at Calvary Chapel, 3800 27th Parkway, Sarasota,3 PM, , with Bro. Rod Myers officiating. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Joshua Village or Mt. Dora Children's Home.

Jim & Maria Parker – Dec. 31, 2020

Okay, Dandy Don, hand over a piece of your birthday cake. Then reach for the sky, . . . if you still can.

Hey, ol' pard . . . , we jest stopped by the ranch house to say:

Happy Birthday to ya, Don !!!

Stan & Peggy Paregien
Feb. 9, 2021

Don's 90th Birthday

Feb. , 2022 at Lakewood Ranch, FL

Stan Paregien, Pat Landes, & Don Betts

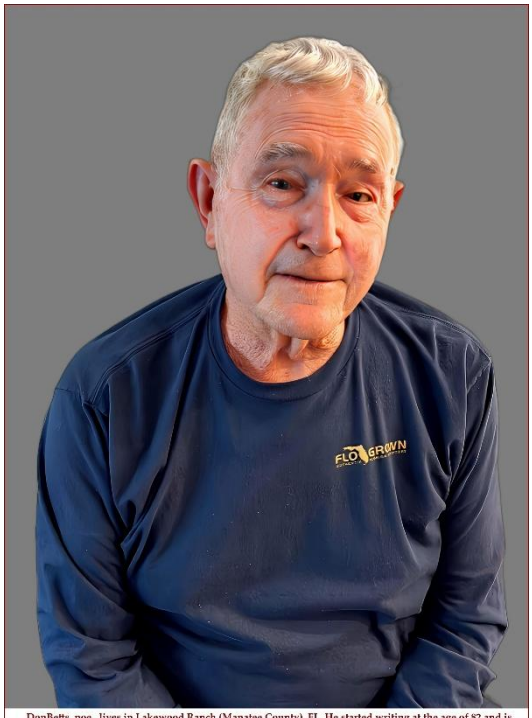
Mrs. Jim (Maria) Parker & Mrs. Stan (Peggy) Paregien acting silly at Don Betts' 90th birthday party.

Don Betts Joking Around at 90 Years of Age

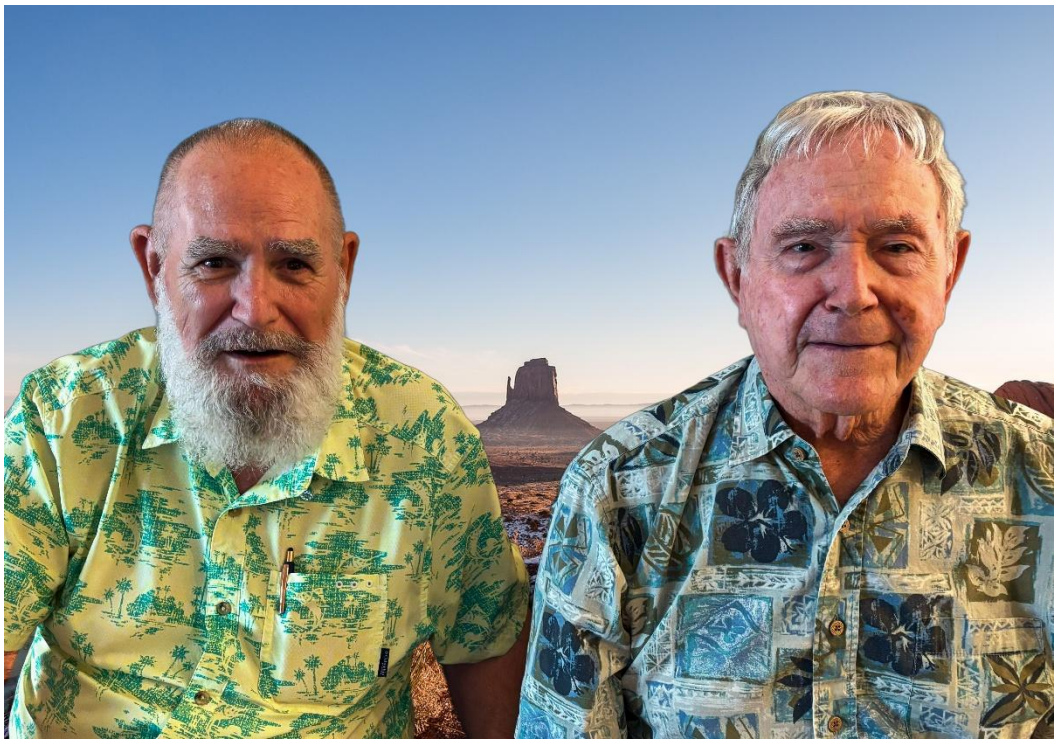
Peggy & Stan Paregien's 60 Wedding Anniversary

At Don & Judy's in Lakewood Ranch on May 31, 2022.

Stan, Peg, Judy & Don . . . gone wild



DonBetts, poe, lives in Lakewood Ranch (Manatee County), FL. He started writing at the age of 82 and is still writing at the age of 93.Photo taken by Stan Paregien on May 8, 2025

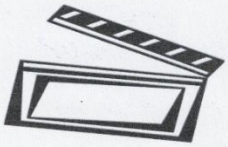


Stan Paregien & Don Betts in the middle of Monument Valley, Utah . . . or, maybe not. Just a little "A.I." magic. Aug. 14, 2025 at the Betts home in Lakewood Ranch, FL.

Judy Betts & Peggy Paregien, same date & location.

Chapter 8

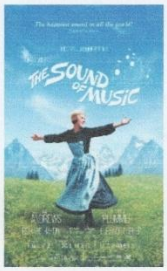
Poetry Archive



FLICKS

The Bird Cage, some producers quest
Not at all one of Hollywood's best
Character lacking in wholesome roles
Nothing pertaining to heavenly goals
What has become of reality
If men wish to be with a he, not a she

A timely tale is **Gone With The Wind**
Just one word used, I'd not recommend
A few scenes were intense, unspeakably gory
Yet, sadly portrayed the depths of the story
Though the plot was beset with various guile
Clark Gable, as Rhett, evaded Scarlett's wile



Every now and then fate plays a trick
And a great story filmed, is a first-rate flick
In a tale of looming war casting shadows dark
Blooming stars knocked this one out'a the park
Julie Andrews, as Maria, put Austrian Alps on the map
The Sound of Music introduced, the family Von Trapp

I 'spect my favorite movie, after all is said n' done
Is watchin' cowboys slingin' lead, n' seldom hittin' anyone
Sleepin' near th' campfire, out on th' open range
With **Hopalong, Roy, or Gene**, ain't really all that strange
But, 'tis still a mystery, ain't no answer yet been found
How a western six-shooter, fires at least two-dozen rounds

Don Betts <> March 15, 2025

Be the Best at Bein' What You Are

Don Betts - March 8, 2023

Simple farming folks, many years ago
Sometimes joked, 'bout how life should go
But when I questioned, somewhat seriously
What might be best for the likes of me
This was their answer, "Don, you'll go far"
"Just be the very best, at bein' what you are"

It don't matter none at all if your big or small
Ain't no never-mind bein' homely, short nor tall
A yen for dirty work, or love of lofty occupation
May reveal discrepancy in gainful compensation
But what matters after all, when put to th' test
Did you do all you could do, to be your very best

Bein' best at what you do, best at what you are
Your aim must be true, you've got to surpass par
It's not apt to happen, if your effort is spent
On bein' satisfied with just enough to pay the rent
Up on the farm, I noticed cream rose to the top
And it took some perseverance to bring in a crop

Enjoying one's profession, coupled with diligence
Avoiding greed's obsession, just makes sense
And, on the other hand, never be content
With handouts and promises from the government
Tarps, tents and needles are no way to redeem
Those who wheedle, "where's my American Dream"

I need Thee Oh, I Need Thee!

Lord, hear my prayer
Please let me know You're there
Please do not hide from me
Tell me, close You'll ever be
Reduce my burden now I pray
Make my sorrow go away
Dry my tears, hear my plea
When satan nears, help me flee

My prayer is not for me alone
Or for the wrongs that I atone
I ask for others everywhere
Please lift the burdens, they too, bear
When illness burns without, within
Relieve the hurt, and forgive sin
Lord, You hear their woeful moan
Lament for evil seeds they've sown

The path of sinful life is steep
Night reigns dark, with restless sleep
Lord, lave me with warm heavenly light
Let me not stray far from Your sight
Yea Lord, fill me with spiritual song
Keep me free from willful wrong
Father, God, Most Holy One
Tether me to thy Dear Son

Don Betts <> August 2, 2025

Malachi 3: 2-3

If, on the morrow, I should fail to wake
Feel for me, no sorrow, I've reached the Pearly gate

If, on the morrow, I fail to rise and shine
Gone the fear of 'charo', God's pure love is mine

If, on the morrow, I've breathed my last
Earth-life, a fleeting shadow, forever in the past

If, on the morrow, I remain in the quick
Will I beg or borrow, from the spiritually sick
Will I walk the narrow lane, or choose broad avenues
If I seek to gain, will I cause someone to lose

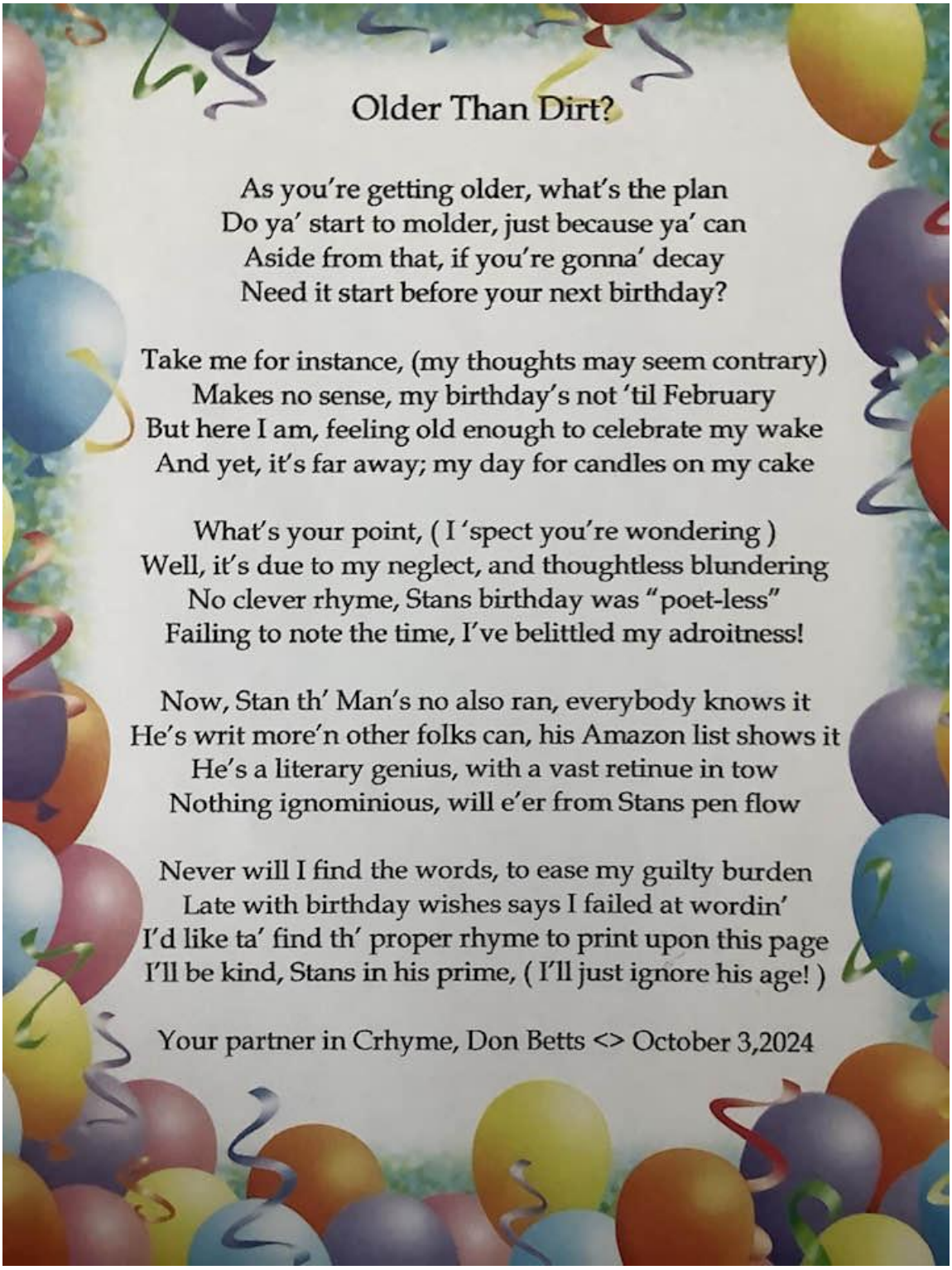
If, on the morrow, I accumulate earthly gain
Will the seeds I sow, aggravate another's pain
Will any goodness show, if I'm insincere
If rudeness overflows, will I prime another's fear

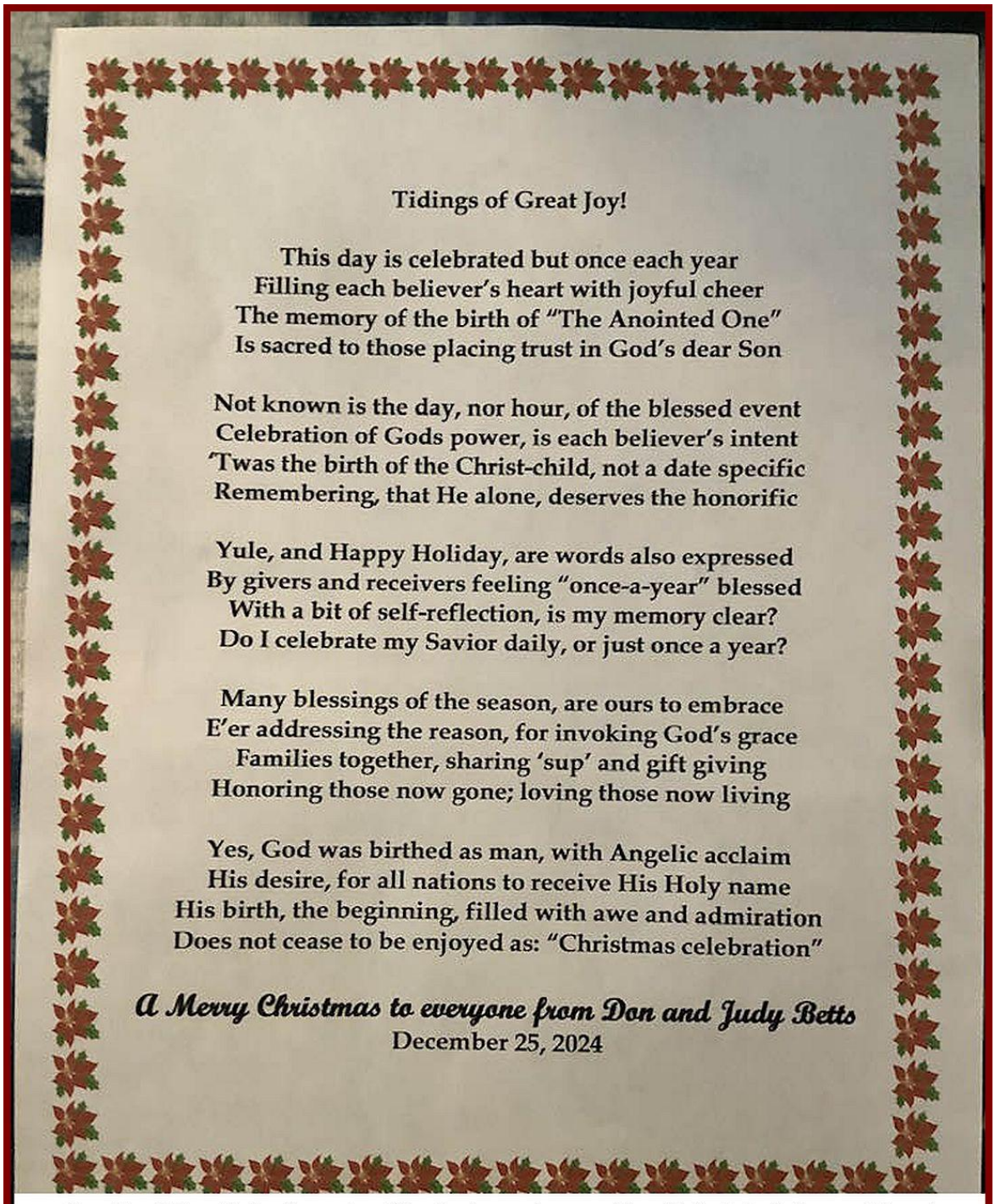
If, like apostle Paul, and what he had to say
I'd like to go, and all, but is it better if I stay
In search of my reward, so appealing to my soul
Is it better, Lord, if I help others seek their goal

Paul left it up to God, and, so shall I as well
I accept His chastening rod, His story I must tell

Don Betts <> April 3, 2025

Don lives in Lakewood Ranch (Manatee County), FL. He started writing at the age of 82 and is still writing at the age of 93.


Older Than Dirt?
As you're getting older, what's the plan
Do ya' start to molder, just because ya' can
Aside from that, if you're gonna' decay
Need it start before your next birthday?
Take me for instance, (my thoughts may seem contrary)
Makes no sense, my birthday's not 'til February
But here I am, feeling old enough to celebrate my wake
And yet, it's far away; my day for candles on my cake
What's your point, (I 'spect you're wondering)
Well, it's due to my neglect, and thoughtless blundering
No clever rhyme, Stans birthday was "poet-less"
Failing to note the time, I've belittled my adroitness!
Now, Stan th' Man's no also ran, everybody knows it
He's writ more'n other folks can, his Amazon list shows it
He's a literary genius, with a vast retinue in tow
Nothing ignominious, will e'er from Stans pen flow
Never will I find the words, to ease my guilty burden
Late with birthday wishes says I failed at wordin'
I'd like ta' find th' proper rhyme to print upon this page
I'll be kind, Stans in his prime, (I'll just ignore his age!)
Your partner in Crhyme, Don Betts <> October 3,2024



Tidings of Great Joy!

This day is celebrated but once each year
Filling each believer's heart with joyful cheer
The memory of the birth of "The Anointed One"
Is sacred to those placing trust in God's dear Son

Not known is the day, nor hour, of the blessed event
Celebration of Gods power, is each believer's intent
'Twas the birth of the Christ-child, not a date specific
Remembering, that He alone, deserves the honorific

Yule, and Happy Holiday, are words also expressed
By givers and receivers feeling "once-a-year" blessed
With a bit of self-reflection, is my memory clear?
Do I celebrate my Savior daily, or just once a year?

Many blessings of the season, are ours to embrace
E'er addressing the reason, for invoking God's grace
Families together, sharing 'sup' and gift giving
Honoring those now gone; loving those now living

Yes, God was birthed as man, with Angelic acclaim
His desire, for all nations to receive His Holy name
His birth, the beginning, filled with awe and admiration
Does not cease to be enjoyed as: "Christmas celebration"

A Merry Christmas to everyone from Don and Judy Betts
December 25, 2024

Our friend Don Betts, formerly of Bradenton and now with wife Judy in Lakewood Ranch, is nearing 93 but still putting his quill pen on parchment and turning out poems that are sometimes funny, sometimes inspirational, and sometimes both. They are "saints" in the real biblical sense, not in the high-church tradition. -- Stan Paregien - Bradenton, FL

So-so Soul of Politico Woe

So what? Blue? Purple? Red?
Compared to yesteryear, what now?
Numbers, percentages, who's ahead?
Apoplexy creases the troubled brow!

" I'm the only candidate "
" Hear my words of truth "
"I alone, can fix the gate"
" I'll prime the pump! Do I act 'long-in-the-tooth "?

Zounds! Don't you understand?
Trouble surrounds; north, east, south, and west
What is that mumbling sound? Come on, man!
Gelatto? Black and white is best!

He didn't do what he said he'd do
You can count on me, I served in foreign lands
I'm younger than he, prettier too!
I'll save humanity, I've made assertive plans
He's left the lineup! Now's my chance
I'll be the pin-up, at the elephant-donkey dance!

What lies at the end of the road, as we, the meek, are led"?
Will society still erode, or peace abide instead?
Does the answer lie in the heart of man?
Is his soul enrolled in Divinities plan?
Be assured, our God will have his say
He's the Great I Am, the One and Only way!

Don Betts ~ January 23, 2024

Who, Me?

I was informed, I've been told
"You can't be you just because you're old"!
It's not about me; I must confess
I must now be, not more but less

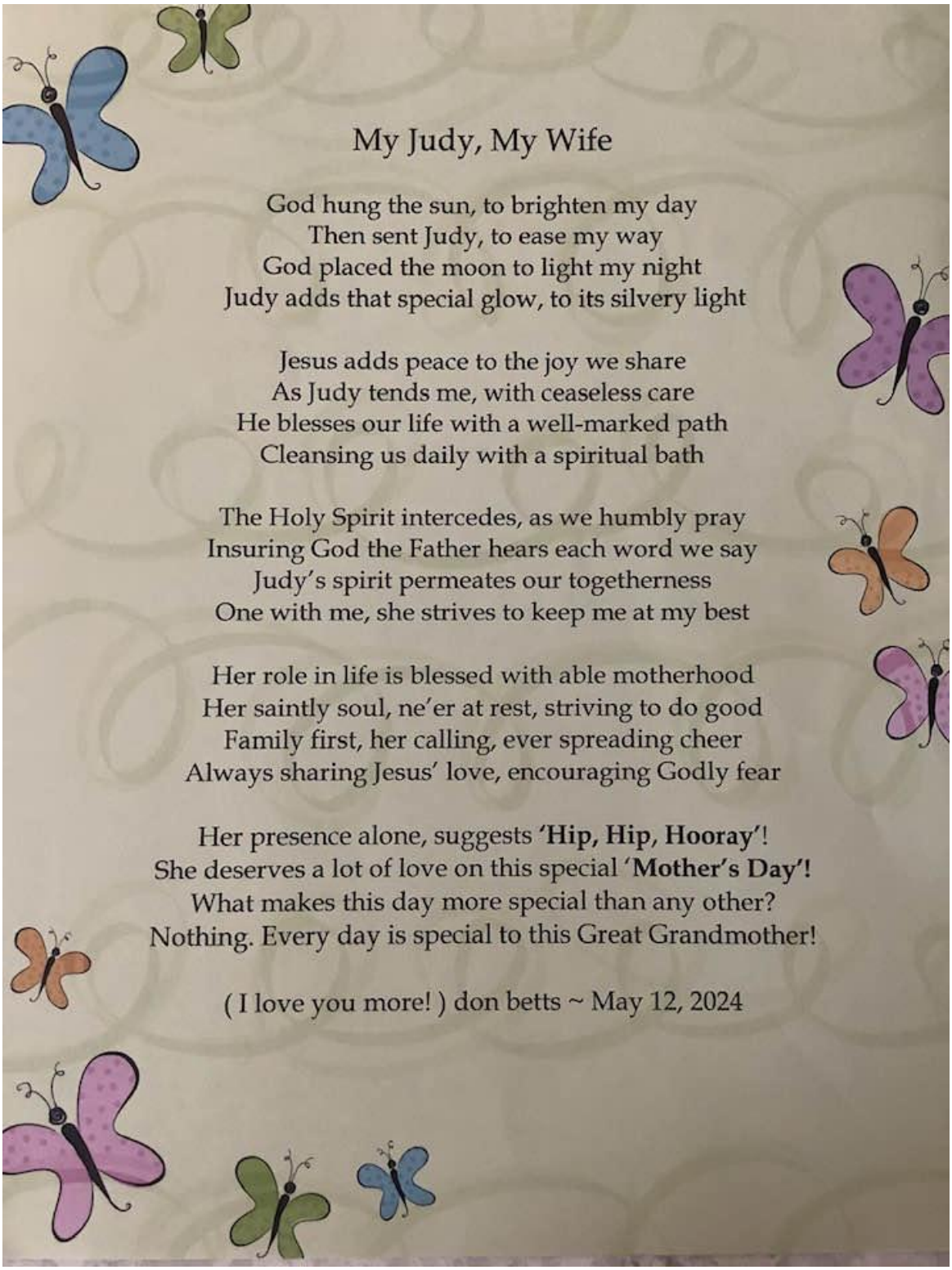
Others needs are paramount
Deeds I do, I must not count
With strength retained, I must perform
Above and beyond an old man's norm

I must be strong, standing tall
Assisting, lest another fall
I must attend the wanting soul
With strength undaunted, a servant's role

It's been said; so, shall I say
Where will abides, there is a way
I'll lift my chin and set aside
All mortal pain and selfish pride

I'll ask my God to set me free
From the fog that now beleaguers me
I'll soothe another's aches and pains
And serve as long as breath remains
Though time has bent my aged bod
I'll not resign 'til neath the sod

Don Betts ~ May 19, 2024



My Judy, My Wife

God hung the sun, to brighten my day
Then sent Judy, to ease my way
God placed the moon to light my night
Judy adds that special glow, to its silvery light

Jesus adds peace to the joy we share
As Judy tends me, with ceaseless care
He blesses our life with a well-marked path
Cleansing us daily with a spiritual bath

The Holy Spirit intercedes, as we humbly pray
Insuring God the Father hears each word we say
Judy's spirit permeates our togetherness
One with me, she strives to keep me at my best

Her role in life is blessed with able motherhood
Her saintly soul, ne'er at rest, striving to do good
Family first, her calling, ever spreading cheer
Always sharing Jesus' love, encouraging Godly fear

Her presence alone, suggests **'Hip, Hip, Hooray'**!
She deserves a lot of love on this special '**Mother's Day'!**
What makes this day more special than any other?
Nothing. Every day is special to this Great Grandmother!

(I love you more!) don betts ~ May 12, 2024

Patriot, Where Art Thou?

I wax poetic in seasons political
I feel I must voice my opinion
If my words seem hypocritical
Free speech is within my dominion
I'm loathe to just sit back
Ignoring unethical lies
While evil political hacks
Attempt to bedevil the wise

In the face of all that's befallen
In a very brief span of time
Leaders have missed their callin'
And squandered my nations dime
Americas fiscal existence
My personal holdings too
Affected by ill-willed resistance
By those not attending their due

I have no need of dictators
Or those with traitorous bent
There is no place for race haters
Nor space for ethnic discontent
America deserves proper leadership
Sworn to hold to, protect, and defend
The Constitution that frees from the whip
Wielded by the few, who seek Americas end

Don Betts ~ July 4, 2024

Amore!

Cupid drew his bowstring taut
An arrow docked and aimed
A lonely heart with sadness fraught
Is now true love in chains

Ne'er say, 'tis little more than lust
When a soul is set to shaking
Lest you've received that fatal thrust
And play the role of Cupids making

Ah! The pang that lights the flame of love
The archer has not missed the cue
Cooing of the snow-white dove
Happy tears, flow like morning dew

Gone, the ache of a lonely heart
When the spark ignites a glow
Cupid's dart has played its part
But true-love starts at "ciao amo"!

"Ciao Amo, my Judy"? Be my valentine?

Don Betts ~ February 14, 2024

Truth is Always Right

The devil went down to Georgia and took a look around
He liked Lucrezia Borgia's plan, politics, dirty and down
Though he was behind he still had time
Til the opening of the polls
But what the heck, he'd stacked the deck
With demons names on mail-in registry rolls

His evil goal, was to steal the soul, of the world's greatest nation
So he fiddled around, betting he was bound
To cause soul upsetting temptation
His sour notes, played to the votes, of those with itching ears
The hoi-pol-loi marched with joy, their jeers producing tears

Chants intoned by mental clones
Were heard from sea to shining sea
Demand for justice was moaned and groaned
No rule of law, was perceived as freedoms guarantee
Taunts, rocks and bottles thrown at those sworn to protect
Lives of the masses filled with dis-respect

Satan danced to the music behind the scenes, often joining in.
Gleefully he encouraged the mindless evil sin
He fueled desire to burn and loot, property not their own
And provided all the vitriol to turn hearts to stone

But out of the ashes, a mighty roar of optimism
The eyes of the prudent, were cleared of stigmatism
The evil fiddler, used color to divide the nation's population
His screeching tune of dis-order, was nearing overdue cessation

He had bet his prized violin, against America's stalwart soul
But an emboldened rabble could not end, true patriotism's role
The devil, with tears flowing in defeat, was obliged to retreat
He laid his golden fiddle down at Uncle Sam's feet

Don Betts~ June 14, 2020

Maternally Speaking

Do not misunderstand, you who fit the mold
I write not with shaking hand, nor less than bold
You know from whence my words are conceived
To deny falls short of one to be believed

I call for your attention, if you are so inclined
To hear these words of observation, I freely opine
When reminded of servitude, are you only annoyed
Have you recollection of the service you've enjoyed?

From the day of your birth, watching you play
Helping form your worth, day by day
Mom's and Grammy's were there, always on call
Forever at hand, to catch you lest you fall

As you progressed with each year of learning
They did not rest, your best was their yearning
Financial assistance was but a part
Of all the "leg up's" that came from their heart

Tell me, I pray, most honestly, why
The hours and days and months go by
And those in need of your love and attention
Seldom receive an honorable mention?

Don Betts ~ January 25, 2022

To Be or Not To Be?

Wow! What is happening? What is this place?
I seem compelled to swim, at an Olympic pace
I feel this is my destiny, though it seems a bit banal
Vying to reach a goal, within a narrow canal?
I'm ahead of my competitors, most can't keep up
If I wiggle on, will I receive the winner's cup?
Did I say wiggle? Is that aquatic terminology?
Don't make me giggle, I know what's in this swim for me
I know I've been selected, to win this final leg
I will not be rejected, and I'll have no need to beg
The Utmost Cosmic Power, trained me for this win
It's my time, it's now, let fertility begin!

Pro-creation began with a physical hum
Twas Gods plan, me and this quizzical ovum
What had we begun, exactly what would be?
Had we hit a home run, twins? Maybe three?
Gestation progressed, it was nearing time of birth
Mom and Dad obsessed, with this greatest gift on earth
Then I heard the rabble, with their cries of doom
Girl, it's your body, tear that thing from your womb!
God-in-three-persons shed a bucketful of tears
Hearing the rantings, of satan and his sinful peers

Moms' eyes are filled with love, as she looks at me
I'm glad she helped me run my race, I'm glad she let-me-be!

Don Betts ~ July 28, 2022

Author .... ity!!

"I'll write a book", I said
Something poignant, easily read
With a fresh and worthy topic
Not intended as myopic

With journalistic excellence as my guide
And narcissistic viewpoints tossed aside
I'll use font bright and bold
And pen a story ne'er e'er told

My tome will be linguistically framed
Narratology succinct, laconically arranged
Nouns, verbs, and adjectives; put into play
Text compiled to portray, all I wish to say

Pragmatism shall define
Any writ assigned as mine
I'll edit so as to exclude
Any precept lewd or rude

If the words I use to tell my story
Seem malign, inane or gory
Forgive my proclivity for etymological sin
Now let's see, where shall I begin?

If my book's a best seller, inciting a ruse
Will I look like the next feller, writing fake news?

Don Betts ~ August 21, 2023

The Church at Judy's House

Don Bett is still writing poetry at age 91. He wrote this one on July 23, 2023.

I love the Lord's Day, when we get to meet
In Judy's living room, at Jesus feet
Where heart and soul, are bound hand in glove
As bro and sis extol, our God's faithful love

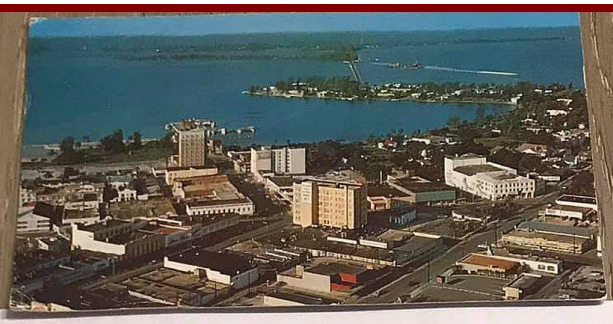
I love Sunday morn, first day of the week
Even when I'm torn, I know whom I seek
As I feel the warmth of those who gather there
Joined together; in heartfelt, thankful prayer

I love Jesus' presence in the depths of His word
His plan of salvation, sweetest psalm ever heard
I can feel the beat of each heart in the room
As we commune His exit from the tightly sealed tomb

Yes, the Lords Day! When we seek His grace
Ever watchful, 'til we meet Him face to face
Sharing with each other the hope that lies
Within the blessed blood of our Savior's sacrifice

God's spirit is with us, I feel Him near at hand
As our songs are comingled with the angel band
Yes, I love to be with others, in Judy's house of prayer
'Specially on the Lord's Day, when He joins us there

Don and Judy Betts have hosted a house church in Lakewood Ranch, FL for about two years. It is a blessing for every participant. - Stan Paregien



The Way Across

The Ringling Causeway was how it was known
When I was just a kid, not quite grown
The old wooden bridge connecting each Key
Served much longer than was meant to be
The incoming tide was often swift
Causing the pilings to bend and shift
Strong currents engendered moans and groans
The deck planking creaked like brittle bones
Saturday morns on my way to Cub Scouts
I'd ride my bike from home with childish doubts
It was several miles from home to town
And ridin' over those bridges let my courage down
Many years later, I hafta' admit
I'm all the stronger because of it
The old two-lane bridge, now just a memory
I recall crossing over, very timorously
Sporadic maintenance through depression years
Allowed decking gaps to heighten adolescent fears
Not so many folks have lived the advent
Of two new replacement spans, and a lot of money spent
Concrete and steel, I s'spect, a more permanent way
To get all who wish to go, 'crost Sarasota Bay
But the old wooden structures, I think of now and a'gin
Are a pleasant memory, from those day's way back when!

Don Betts ~ February 21, 2020

A note from your humble correspondent, Don Betts. The card pictures the City of Sarasota as it existed in 1953, looking across the Bay towards Bird Key & St Armands. The Ringling Causeway began at Golden Gate Point. The first replacement bridge (under construction) is visible in the upper right corner. This postcard was mailed to my brother Bob from my Mother thanking him for the gift of their first TV set. Mom & Dad were George & Loretta Betts

Man To Man

God took a handful of dust from the earth
And mixed it with water and stuff
Then, He stirred in a dollop of sadness and mirth
The Spirit asked, "Think that's enough?"

The Word intoned, "Shouldn't man resemble Us?"
Tho made here below; he should learn of things above!
In charge of his house, that would surely be a plus
His rule must be attitude, his heart filled with love

Creation complete, God added a perk
Man was given a needed mate
Something went wrong, Adam played along, the jerk
They ate from the tree, God had said, "Let it be"
Eviction from the garden was their fate
From that day 'til now, man's life has ne'er been stable
Sweat upon man's brow, and hate since Cain slew Abel
Evil deeds darken the night, as desire leads to sin
Husbands try to do right, but often filled with chagrin

Man was meant to lead, father in his earthly house
His gender was to wield a manly stance
He was not meant to cower like a cornered mouse
There was no intent, for Eve to wear her husband's pants

Don Betts ~ June 26, 2022

The Pain of Love

There is an old refrain
Voiced long ago
Acknowledging undue pain
Felt by one made low

Inflicted un-intentionally
Or oft-times out of spite
Verbal hurt is essentially
No, definitely not right

Happy days of friendship
And heartfelt enterprise
Develop into kinship
As deeper ties arise

Pure love vaunteth not itself
Writ of wisdom from above
Amour existing in good health
As tuneful as a cooing dove

The crux of the song I speak of
Defines ardor, clothed in a pall
"We always hurt the one we love
The one we shouldn't hurt at all"

Don Betts ~ July 2, 2020

Memory Day

A tear ran down his gaunt and leathery cheek
His patriotism yet was strong, though his body weak
The chaos in the street brought a sudden chill
The sights and sounds, a memory of "Porkchop Hill"

He recalled the horror, on that day of living hell
And the mournful cries of those who lay where they fell
How could he forget how his own body sagged
As his heart did now, watching someone burn the flag

To this old "leatherneck", it was hard to understand
How those so privileged, could hate the very land
That he and his compatriots gave so much to guarantee
That future generations might continue to be free

With sadness, he watched the actions of this evil retinue
As lawmen stood aside, allowing mayhem to ensue
It tore at his soul, like a festering sore
Was this what he and others, had given so much for?

He turned the wheelchair, his only form of locomotion
To better see and hear, a sound of musical commotion

"America the Beautiful" wafted his way

Patriotism would live to see another day!!

[To all those who've served: Thank You]

Don Betts~ ADIII, US Navy, 1951/1955

RESTLESS REST

When dark clouds hover and skies are gray
My sad heart yearns for a brighter day
When the night is long and unrest prevails
And the lull of a soothing song yet fails
With a mind full of memories, must I wakeful lay

When slumber comes, it greets the morning light
With less than proper rest, and renewal of my plight
Why does it seem I must relive an unkind prank
I'd like to trade the memories, so dark and dank
For sweet dreams and plenary, all the hours of my night

As I'm reminded of the pain in my flank
It serves to say I only have myself to thank
'Cause, if it's perfection on this earth I seek
I need new direction for a mind that's weak
But I crave no potions, prescribed to quell my angst

Then comes the revelation, my discomfort is so mild
I should feel elation, with my heart running wild
Compared to Golgotha, when day turned to night
Achy edema should not fill me with fright
Rest comes with realization; I am my Fathers child!

Don Betts ~ May 7, 2022

Talk About Town

County commissioners, hear our pleas'
Much less concrete, many more trees
Slow the "progress" if you please
Leave a bit of room for an on-shore breeze

Mister developer, don't leave us in despair
There's more to livin' than big city flair
Leave our mighty oaks, don't scrape the land bare
A few old folks, have local history to share

Building contractor, you build to renew
"Git-er-done", "and fast", is your purview
Money ain't in hand 'til the work is through
Perhaps the building will stand, a generation or two

A new board is elected, and the beat goes on
Tear down yesterday, every memory gone
Sadly, future money sees the last tree sawn
Remember our hometown, when everyone had a lawn?

Peaceful habitation was the rule in play
For folks with orientation, others here for just a day
Our quiet little fishing town, sun now cloaked with gray
Wears a sodden gown, its innocence went astray!

Don Betts ~ March 23, 2023

Christus natus!

Don Betts - Lakewood Ranch, FL - Dec. 8, 2023

It's arrived! Christmas twenty-twenty-three!
I'm still alive! And I'm happy to be me!
If I was someone else, would **I** feel this way?
This deep-down love for someone, on **His** special day!

I know you're jolly too! What's Santa going to bring?
You've hung the holly; do you hear the angels sing?
The tree is gaily trimmed, with bright lights burning
Surely thoughts of **Him**, set prayer wheels a'turning!

True Christmas joy, has meaning far beyond
A gift list, with hope that Santa will respond
Happily, we celebrate the Holy birth of **He**
Who came to give the gift of life, for all eternity!

Do you feel **His** love with each resounding gong
As bells ring out and we share a Yuletide song?
Do the gifts 'neath the tree, on Christmas morn
Reflect the gift given thee, on this day **He** was born?

Yes, I'm glad I'm me, in this extra special season!
Tis Golgotha's tree, giving me the reason
For my heart filled with glee at living in 'the Way'
As I celebrate with thee, another Merry Christmas Day!

Another season of love for Peggy and Stan!

Don Judy

A Christmas Poem

The Twenty - Third Psalm

Lord, You are my Shepard;
I hear and recognize Your voice, and I feel safe in Your presence.
I am confident that Your grace protects me from the snares of the evil one.
I shall want for nothing.

Lord, You give me warmth from the cold, you provide whatever need or Godly desire that I crave, to live righteously.
You allow me to live comfortably,
prospering in well doing. You allow me to live in peace as the stormy world rages around me.

Lord, You restore my soul;
When I falter, when I weaken, You lift me up and replant my feet on firm ground. You clear the pathway to righteousness, allowing me to wear Your Holy name.

I will fear no evil!
Yea, Lord, even if I am faced with the shadowy threat of death, I will not be fearful, for I am assured that You walk beside me. The strength of Your Holiness protects and comforts me.

You prepare a table before me;
Lord, in the face of those who would do me harm, You provide me with strength to confront my adversaries boldly, even as I sup from the bounty You prepare. I am blessed with the comforting oil of Your grace, an honor that tells me my blessings exceed my ability to contain them; ergo, they overflow.

Your goodness and mercy sustains me every day of my life:
I have confidence that Your grace will allow me to dwell with You eternally, in Your heavenly abode.

Don Betts ~ May 2, 2023

CHARACTERIZED?

I was born one night, in nineteen-thirty-two
The following morn, all was bright and new
I knew not, at that time of beginning
That life was fraught with losing and winning

What would I be, what would I possess
Left up to me, one could only guess
How fast would I grow, what height would I attain
Would I be halt or slow, or suffer mental strain?

Was my name to be in lights, with other cinematic stars
Perhaps I might be driven in big shiny cars!
How would my role in life be seen, as sad, or funny?
Might lifestyle dictate poverty, or pockets filled with money?

Could wealth be mine, beyond human need
Would my life be filled, with opulence and greed
At the end of my days, how would I be known
What would I profit from seeds I had sown?

Man's desire for material things
Derives from the pleasure those things bring
My wife calls me "hers", and I call her "mine"
To all that that refers, is well and good and fine
But it's been said, and it's true, I guess
The only thing you truly own, is the character you possess!

Don Betts ~ July 2, 2017

Conventional Confusion

by Don Betts - Bradenton, FL

July 19, 2016

He worked his way to the edge of Eden
Twas the end of day, the animals needed feedin'
As he moved along on the periphery
The air was filled with a sweet melody
Of a sudden, something strange was in the garden
There was static in the air
The new formed man stood still and hearkened
To sounds that curled his hair

Boisterous voices, emitting words he'd never heard before
Someone speaking loudly, followed by a roar
Repetitious chanting, over and over again
The animals in the garden never made such a din
Some words stood out, but he knew not what they meant
He was almost certain they were not heaven sent
Names unknown to Adam, were used with vehemence
Some of the rhetoric seemed to have no limits

In the garden later, when nighttime fell
Adam said to his Creator, I've something to tell
I was near the edge, where you told me not to cross
I'm sure I heard something, but I'm really at a loss
I heard a lot that's new to me, I'm sure of that
But Lord, I'd like to ask, **"What's a democrat?"**
With heavenly candor, well endowed with His grace
The Creator answered Adam, standing face to face
Adam, I've asked you to avoid dirty words
A democrat is residue, voided by the birds

DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

An Independence Day Essay

The Cost of Freedom is Less Than The Expense of Ignorance

by Don Betts

Copyrighted June 21, 2016

Most of the good that we now pleasure in
Has origin in blood spilt by evil men

Consider the beginning of our great nation
The people oppressed by undue legislation
Bound by writs from across the ocean
Stirring souls to unchecked emotion
With unfair taxes and fines and fees
The colonies economy was down on its knees

Desire was great for men to be free
From Kingdom rule laced with tyranny
Some, however, were loyal to the Crown
Not willing to risk their wealth going down
Wiser men though, were endowed with expectation
Of freedom allowed in an unfettered nation
Oppression of the masses by rule from the top
Would yield to home rule, suppression would stop

Gallant men, outnumbered by the foe
Soon dealt the Kings men a fatal blow
Much blood had flowed in gory battles
Loosed by musket and cannon and saber rattles
But victory ensued, independence was won
Ceasing loss of life, of father or son

The infant nation had growing pains
From ocean to ocean across the plains
Practices that challenged some to be free
Still bound others in misery

Internal war, parting brother from brother
Each one in opposition, fighting the other
The decree was for all to be free and equal
Some, even today, would welcome a sequel
To the unrest that preceded that civil fight
That decided once and for all, we must unite

United we've been through the agony of wars
Subduing the foe, on so many foreign shores
Ever the protector of those desiring peace
Yet not blind to the fact, strife will never cease

Now, more than ever, evil men with Satan's heart
Seek to kill and maim, destruction to impart
While freedoms message has been asleep
World-wide terror continues to creep

The goodness of our nation in its infancy
Is threatened now, today, by lack of expediency
All the blood ever shed to keep men free
Will soon be usurped in the name of "P.C."
It's time to remove the dreaded cancer that lies
Imbedded in power and greed of those less wise

The electorate, overall, find no mirth in the thought
That residence in our White House can ever be bought
We must endeavor to prevent any effort at hand
To buy, with filthy lucre, the highest office in the land

Such is the plan of one in the race
Seeking presidential status with contorted face
Using many millions of ill-gained wealth
Desiring to rule with policy detrimental to the health
Of the once robust economy, lending to the joy
Of the United States citizenry, Americas hoi-poi-loi

You and I must not allow, by reason of neglect
The Bill of Rights to lie fallow, ceasing to protect
The freedoms expressed by those men at the birth
Of the greatest nation ever, to inhabit the earth

Join me, America, in prayerful resolution
We must reclaim the gift of freedoms constitution
The fate of this country, the land that we love
Still depends on forgiveness from God above
He alone can ease the threat of persecution
Let us seek His mercy, and ask for absolution

Love is the ingredient that keeps man free
God, please bless America, with peace and liberty!

Wagging a Yuletide Dogs Tale

by Don Betts -- Dec. 25, 2017

With twelve days to Christmas, I knew not what to get her
I felt somewhat listless, so I bought a Red Setter
I gave my truelove that pup, on the very first day
Would she ask for a pre-nup? It was hard to say

On the second day of Christmas, with a lot on my mind
I gave her two more canines, of a different kind
These were of the breed called Pomeranian.
Would she think me lost indeed, with an addled cranium?

On the third day of Christmas, I was hearing strange sounds
So I gave her what I thought she'd like, three Bloodhounds
Before the day was over, I'd think of something nice
Tomorrow's gift will bowl her over, no matter what the price

On the fourth day of Christmas, with mind as sharp as an eagles
I delivered to her door, four full grown Beagles.
The next day I'd arrive, with a new kind of gift
One that would provide her with a Yuletide lift

On the fifth day of Christmas, I thought, "What you want to bet?"
"She's going to be surprised, with what she's going to get"
I went all-out and spent my last few dollars
On five small Chihuahuas, with rhinestone collars

On the sixth day of Christmas, I knew just what to do
I gave her puppy chow, and six Chow puppies too
I knew that was the day her heart would sing
So I gave her also, a six caret gold and diamond ring

On the seventh day of Christmas, with no if's and's nor butts
I was sure she'd be elated, with seven over-fed Mutts.
These older dogs, I got for free
But she would be delighted, though they had no pedigree

On the eighth day of Christmas, along with squeaking toy
I gave her eight **Dalmatians**, I was sure she would enjoy
It was hard to believe, but believe it or not
For some odd reason, they were all named **Spot**

On the ninth day of Christmas, the halls filled with hollies
I could not resist, I gave her nine fluffy Collies.
Human instinct gave this breed an air of being classy
Each in their own time, would surely be called Lassie

On the tenth day of Christmas, this special day for believers
She was the receiver of not one, but ten Golden Retrievers.
The days were passing fast, I was filled with glee
Would my gifts be ever-lasting, as I wished her love to be?

On the eleventh day of Christmas, I think I made some gains
The gift I gave her, was eleven Great Danes.
Their great size was to show, my love was not just fiddle-faddle
Each of these big guys, came with bridle and saddle

On the twelfth day of Christmas, this gift the final one
To end the twelve day season, a dozen Dobermans.
The protective nature of this breed, was important to me
Her safety would be guaranteed, by guard-dog heredity

My thoughtful gifts now given, is my life complete?
Have I earned her love, or will I feel defeat?
With Christmas spirit in the air, joy and happiness everywhere
What of her love, will she declare it, or will I fall into despair?

I'm summoned to her royal court
Pronouncement rendered swift and short
On the first day after Christmas, my true-love gave to me
The job of cleaning cages in the royal "doggery"
Was she that demeaning, of gifts sentimental
That I forever after would be cleaning her royal kennel?

Beyond the din of doggies yapping,
And the strain of Danes (with leashes snapping)
My thoughts are kindling other fires
What I'd sought has changed to new desires

I'm thinking now of offering my sincere thanks
By sending her a feline, from the breed called Manx
With less than gentle breeding, and wickedness in its eyes
A reading might be needed of the Queens demise
Happiness might return, I could sing a Yuletide song
Life as royal kennel master, seems oh-so-wrong

Like the tail of the Manx, diminutive in size
To carry out my mode of thanks, seems unwise
A merry Christmas time, with feeling of was-sail
Is a wishful way of ending, this waggish dog tale

End